

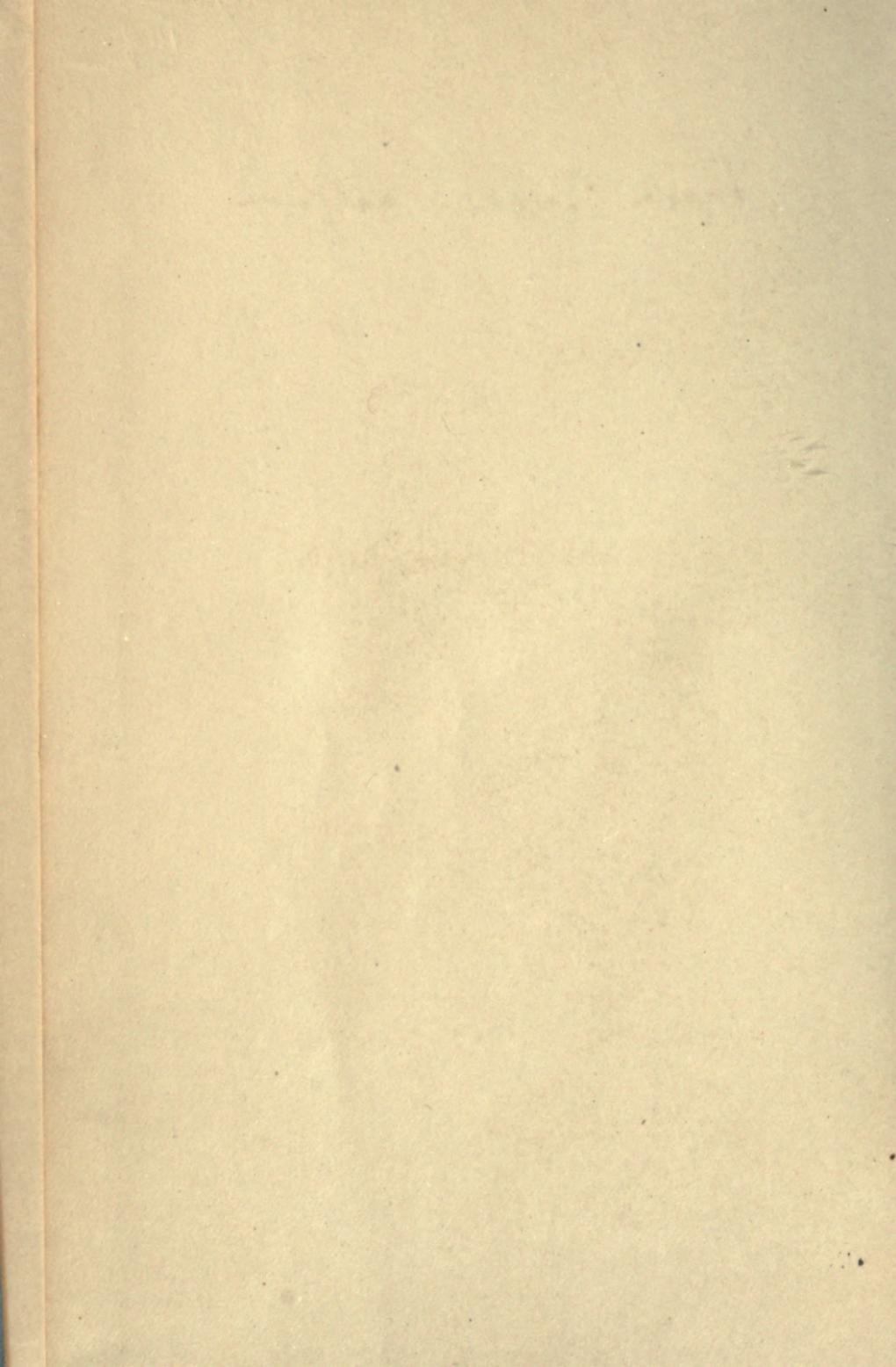
The Steam-Shovel Man

RALPH D. PAINÉ



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Master Gerald Hodges.



THE STEAM-SHOVEL MAN

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He stood at the brink of this tremendous chasm

THE STEAM-SHOVEL MAN

By
RALPH D. PAINE

Author of "A Cadet of the Black Star Line," "The Wrecking Master," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
B. J. ROSENMEYER

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THE STEAM-SHOVEL MAN

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CHAPTER I

WALTER GOODWIN'S QUEST

A STOUT, elderly man stepped from a street-car on the water-front of New York and hastened toward the nearest wharf at a lumbering trot. He held in one hand a large suit-case which must have been insecurely fastened, for, as he dodged to avoid collision with other wayfarers, the lid flew open and all sorts of things began to spill out.

The weather-beaten gentleman was in such a violent hurry and his mind was so preoccupied that he failed to notice the disaster, and was leaving in his wake a trail of slippers, shirts, hair-brushes, underwear, collars, and what not, that suggested a game of hare-and-hounds. In fact, the treacherous suit-case had almost emptied itself before he paid heed to the shouts of uproarious laughter from the delighted teamsters, roustabouts, and idlers. With a

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snort, he fetched up to glare behind him, and his expression conveyed wrath and dismay.

This kind of misfortune, like the case of the man who sits down on his own hat, excites boundless mirth but no sympathy whatever. The victim stood stock-still and continued to glare and sputter as if here was a situation totally beyond him.

A tall lad, passing that way, jumped to the rescue and began to gather up the scattered wreckage. He was laughing as heartily as the rest of them—for the life of him he couldn't help it—but the instincts of a gentleman prompted him to undertake the work of salvage. As fast as an armful was collected, the owner savagely rammed it into the suit-case, and when this young friend in need, Walter Goodwin by name, came running up with the last consignment he growled, after fumbling in his pockets:

"Not a blessed cent of change left! Come aboard my ship and I'll square it with you. If I had time, I'd punch the heads of a few of those loafing swabs who stood and laughed at me."

"But I don't want to be paid for doing a little favor like that," said Goodwin. "And I

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am afraid I laughed, too. It did look funny, honestly."

"You come along and do as I tell you," rumbled the heated mariner, who had paid not the least attention to these remarks. "Do you mind shouldering this confounded bag? I am getting short-winded, and it may fly open again. Had two nights ashore with my family in Baltimore—train held up by a wreck last night—must have had a poor navigator—made me six hours late—ought to have been aboard ship this morning—I sail at five this afternoon."

He appeared to be talking to himself rather than to Walter Goodwin, who could not refuse further aid. His burly captor was heading in the direction of a black-hulled ocean-steamer which flew the bluepeter at her mast-head. Even the wit of a landsman could not go wrong in surmising that this domineering person was her commander. And for all his blustering manner, Captain Martin Bradshaw had a trick of pulling down one corner of his mouth in a half smile as if he had a genial heart and, given time to cool off and reflect, could perceive the humor of a situation.

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He charged full-tilt along the wharf, and Walter Goodwin meekly followed with the sensation of being yanked at the end of a tow-rope. At the gangway a uniformed officer sang out for a steward, who touched his cap and took charge of the troublesome piece of luggage. Walter hesitated, but as the skipper pounded along the deck toward the bridge he called back:

“Make yourself at home and look about the ship, my lad. I’ll see you as soon as I overhaul my papers.”

The tall youth had no intention of waiting to be paid for his services, but he lived in an inland town and the deck of a ship was a strange and fascinating place. The *Saragossa* was almost ready to sail, bound out to the Spanish Main. Many passengers were on board. Among them were several tanned, robust men who looked as if they were used to hard work out-of-doors. As Goodwin lingered to watch the pleasant stir and bustle, one of these rugged voyagers was saying to a friend who had come to bid him good-by:

“It’s sure the great place for a husky young

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fellow with the right stuff in him. There are five thousand of us Americans on the job, and you bet we're making the dirt fly. I was glad to get back to God's country for my six weeks' leave, but I won't be a bit sorry to see the Big Ditch again."

The other man replied with a shrug and a careless laugh:

"The United States is plenty good enough for me, Jack. I don't yearn to work in any pest-hole of a tropical climate with yellow-fever and all that. It's no place for a white man."

"Oh, you make me tired," good-naturedly retorted the sunburnt giant of a fellow. "You are just plain ignorant. Do I look like a fever-stricken wreck? High wages? Well, I guess. We are picked men. I am a steam-shovel man, as you know, and Uncle Sam pays me two hundred gold a month and gives me living quarters."

"You are welcome to it, Jack. It may look good to you, but you will have to dig the Panama Canal without me."

Walter Goodwin had pricked up his ears. The Panama Canal had seemed so remote that

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it might have belonged in another world, but here were men who were actually helping to dig it. And this steam-shovel man looked so self-reliant and capable and proud of his task that he made one feel proud of his breed of Americans in exile. And that was a most alluring phrase of his, "a great place for a husky young fellow."

After some hesitation the lad timidly accosted him:

"I overheard enough to make me very much interested in what you are doing. Do you think I would stand any show of getting a job on the Panama Canal?"

The stranger's eyes twinkled as he scanned Goodwin and amiably answered:

"As a rule, they don't catch 'em quite as young as you are, my son. What makes you think of taking such a long jump from home?"

"I need the money," firmly announced the youth. "And when it comes to size and strength I'm not exactly a light-weight."

"I'll not dispute it," cheerily returned the steam-shovel man. "I am a man of peace except when I'm hunting trouble. But they

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don't hire Americans on the Isthmus for their muscle. The Colonel—he's the big boss—has thirty thousand West Indian negroes and Spaniards on the pay-rolls to sweat with the picks and shovels. Are you really looking for a job, my boy? Tell me about it."

Walter blushed and felt reluctant to tell his troubles to a stranger. All he could bring himself to say was:

"Well, you see, I simply must pitch in and give my father a lift somehow."

"And you're not old enough to vote!" heartily exclaimed the other. "There's many a grown man that thinks himself lucky if he can buy his own meal-ticket, much less give his father a lift."

"I don't mean to talk big—" began Walter. "It does you credit, my son. I like to see a lad carry a full head of steam. You look good to me. I size you up as our kind of folks. Yes, there are various jobs down there you might get away with. And the lowest wages paid an American employee is seventy-five dollars a month. But remember, it's a long, wet walk back from the Isthmus for a man that goes broke."

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"Oh, I don't even know how I could get there. I am just dreaming about it," smiled Goodwin.

"If you do ever drift down that way, be sure to look me up, understand—Jack Devlin, engineer of steam-shovel 'Twenty-six' in Culebra Cut, and she broke all records for excavating last month."

He crossed the deck with a jaunty swagger, as if there was no finer thing in the world than to command a monster of a steam-shovel eating its way into the slope of Culebra Cut. Walter Goodwin concluded that he had been forgotten by the busy captain of the *Saragossa*, but just then the steward came with a summons to the breezy quarters abaft the wheel-house and chart-room. That august personage, Captain Martin Bradshaw, had removed his coat and collar, and a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles adorned his ruddy beak of a nose. Running his hands through his mop of iron-gray hair, he swung round in his chair and said, with the twist of the mouth that was like an unfinished smile:

"I think I owe you an apology. I failed to take a square look at you until we came aboard.

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You are not the kind of a youngster who expects a tip for doing a man a good turn. I was so flustered and stood on my beam-ends that I made a mistake."

That this seasoned old mariner could have been in such a helpless state of mind over a mishap so trifling as the emptied suit-case made Walter grin in spite of himself. At this Captain Bradshaw beamed through his spectacles and explained:

"I am afraid of my life every minute I'm ashore—what with the infernal fleets of automobiles and trolley-cars and wagons, and the crowds of people in the fairway. A ship at sea is the only safe place for a man, after all. Have a cup of tea or a bottle of ginger-ale?"

"No, thank you, sir. All I want is some information," boldly declared Walter Goodwin, turning very red, but determined to strike while the iron was hot. "Is there any way, if a fellow can't afford to pay his passage, for him to get to the Isthmus of Panama?"

"And for what?" was the surprised query. "You look as if you had a good home and a mother to sew on your buttons. Have you

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been reading sea-stories, or are you a young muck-raker in disguise, with orders to show the American people that the Canal is being dug all wrong?"

"No, I am thinking of trying to find a good job down there," Walter gravely declared. "I can't eat my folks out of house and home any longer. The Isthmus is a great place for a husky young fellow with the right stuff in him. I got it straight from a man who knows."

Captain Martin Bradshaw, who was a shrewd judge of manhood, replied in singularly gentle tones, as if he were thinking aloud:

"I did pretty much the same thing when I was in my teens. And I had the same reasons. I suppose if you broke the news to the folks they wouldn't be exactly enthusiastic."

"I am afraid it would take a lot of argument to convince them that I am sane and sensible," dubiously agreed Walter. "My father isn't used to taking chances, and—well, you know what mothers are, sir. Does it sound crazy to you?"

"No; just a trifle rash," and the wise skipper shook his head. "How old are you?"

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"Seventeen and big for my age."

"I thought you were a year or two older. Well, you are as bold and foolish as a strapping lad of seventeen ought to be, if he has red blood in him. I'll not encourage you to run away from home. Maybe you can find a paying berth on the Isthmus, and maybe not. But it will do you no harm to try. Talk it over at home. If the bee is still in your bonnet a month from now, come to the ship and I'll give you a chance to work your passage to Colon on my next voyage."

Walter stammered his thanks, but the captain turned to rummage among the papers on his desk, as if he could give no more time to the interview. As the youth walked away from the ship, his thoughts were buzzing and his pulse beat faster than usual. The unexpected visit aboard the *Saragossa* had thrilled him like the song of bugles. It awakened a spirit of adventurous enterprise which had hitherto been dormant. It was calling him away to the world's frontier. Jack Devlin, the steam-shovel man, and the captain of the *Saragossa* had whirled him out of his accustomed orbit with a velocity

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that made him dizzy. They were men of action, trained in a rough school, and if Walter wished to follow the same road they were ready to lend him a hand.

He had spent three days in New York, seeking a situation at living wages. His father had given him letters to several business acquaintances, besides which he had investigated such advertisements in the newspapers as sounded promising. He discovered that boys in their teens, no matter how tall and manly they might be, were expected to sell their brains and muscle for so few dollars a week that his boyish hopes of supporting himself were clouded. The city was overcrowded, underpaid.

From the ship he went to the house in which he had lodged, and then straightway to the railroad station to return to his home town of Wolverton. His high-hearted pilgrimage to New York had been a failure in one way, but he was braced and comforted by the bright dream of winning his fortune on the far-away Isthmus. It all sounded too good to be true.

Mr. Horatio Goodwin, the father of this young knight-errant, was a book-keeper who

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had toiled at the same desk for twenty years in the offices of the Wolverton Mills. When a trust gained control of the plant it was promptly closed and dismantled in order to keep up prices by cutting down production. This modern instance of knocking competition on the head was satisfactory to the stockholders, but it brought desolation to the small city of Wolverton, of which the vast mills had been the industrial blood and sinews. The operatives drifted elsewhere, hopeful of finding work, but a middle-aged book-keeper, grown gray and round-shouldered before his time, is likely to find himself stranded in a business age which demands hustling young men of the brand known as "live-wires."

The Goodwins' cottage was pleasantly situated on a slope overlooking the town, but, alas, the streets no longer swarmed with tired, noisy people during the leisure hour after supper; many of the stores were untenanted behind their shuttered fronts; and the myriad windows of the mills stared blank and dead instead of twinkling like rows of jewels to greet the industrious army of the night shift. Discourage-

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ment was in the very aspect of the stagnant town, and it had begun to grip the heart of anxious Mr. Goodwin. For the present, or until he might find something better, he had taken a small position with a coal-dealer in Wolverton.

He had great possessions, however, which were not to be measured in terms of hard cash —to wit, a wife who thought him the finest, bravest gentleman in the world, and a son and daughter who held the same opinion and were desperately in earnest about trying to mend the family fortunes. Walter was half-way through his senior year in high-school and was chiefly notable for a rugged physique, a brilliant record as a base-ball pitcher, and an alarming appetite which threatened to sweep the cupboard bare. His sister Eleanor, three years younger, was inclined to be absent-minded and wrote reams of what she called poetry, a form of industry which could hardly be considered useful in a tight financial pinch.

It was in the evening of a winter's day when Walter came homing back from New York. The other Goodwins were holding a family conference, and it was like Eleanor to kiss her

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father's bald head and pat his cheek with such a protecting, comforting air that her mother found a glimmer of fond amusement in the midst of her worry. The affectionate lass dwelt in a world of romance and her father was a true knight daily faring forth on a quest in which she was serenely confident that he would conquer all the dragons of misfortune.

Walter had wisely concluded that the rash scheme of working his way to the Isthmus should be explained to the family with a good deal of care and tact. To break it to them suddenly would be too much like an explosion. When he tramped into the sitting-room, the welcome was as ardent as if he had been absent for months instead of days. Eleanor and her mother fluttered about him. Supper had been kept warm for him. Was he quite sure the melting snow had not wet his feet?

His father asked, when the excitement had subsided: "Well, what luck, my son?"

Assuming his best bass voice, as man to man, Walter answered: "New York is chuck-full of strong and willing lads anxious to run their legs off for four or five dollars a week. With-

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out throwing any bouquets at myself, I think I ought to be worth more than that to somebody. You see, I couldn't pay for my board and washing, much less give the family income a boost."

"Did my letters help you?"

"Yes, I had an offer of four per from the hardware man. I told him I should have to think it over. Wolverton is as dead as a door-nail, but I can do better than that as a day laborer."

"I hate to think of your quitting school," sighed his father; "but perhaps you can graduate next year." He tried to hide his anxiety by adding quite briskly: "We have a great deal to be thankful for, and this—er—this period of business depression is only temporary, I am sure."

"I seem to be so perfectly useless," pensively murmured Eleanor. "Poetry doesn't pay at all well, even if you are a genius, and then you are supposed to starve to death in a garret."

Walter grinned and pulled her flaxen braid as a token of his high esteem.

"You are mother's little bunch of sunshine,"

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said he, "and as first assistant house-keeper you play an errorless game."

With what was meant to be a careless manner, Walter turned to his father and exclaimed:

"Oh, by the way, I heard of something that sounded pretty good. It isn't in New York——"

"I certainly hope it is no farther away," broke in Mrs. Goodwin. "I can't bear to think of your leaving home at all."

Walter coughed rather nervously and assured her:

"Oh, I should take good care of myself and brush my teeth twice a day and say my prayers ditto, so you wouldn't have the slightest reason to worry about me. And I'd write home every week, sure."

"But couldn't you come home every week?" asked Eleanor.

"Well, hardly, sis. I have heard of the greatest place in the world for a husky young fellow with the right stuff in him. Seventy-five dollars a month, and there are various jobs I am capable of filling——"

"Is this a fairy story?" and Mr. Goodwin

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gazed over his glasses with a perplexed expression.

"No, sir, and the climate is healthy nowadays, and the men on the job look as fit as can be, and they are just the bulliest-looking lot you ever saw and——"

"Oh, Walter, tell us the answer. What *is* it all about?" implored Eleanor.

"I'll send you a monkey and a string of pearls, Sis. Say, father, we Americans ought to be proud of the Panama Canal, don't you think?"

"The Panama Canal!" and Mr. Horatio Goodwin fairly jumped from his chair. "Is this what you have been leading up to?"

"Yes, I want to go there."

"Dear me, why did we let him make the trip to New York alone?" lamented Mrs. Goodwin. "He wants to go to the Panama Canal! Why, it is thousands of miles from home!"

Her agitation might have led one to suppose that Walter had announced his intention of taking up his residence in the moon. But Mr. Goodwin was regarding the ruddy, eager face of his son with a certain wistfulness. Walter

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was undismayed, unscarred by the rough world. Ah, youth might win where plodding middle age had failed. The opportunities were for those who were not old enough to be afraid.

"Tell me about it, Walt," said he, and his voice was kindly and interested.

With bright eyes and animated gestures Walter told them of his acquaintance with Jack Devlin and the master of the *Saragossa*, and how the Panama Canal had been made to seem so near and real. Eleanor promptly soared on rosy wings of fancy and breathlessly interrupted:

"It is of such stuff that heroes are made! I shall never call life humdrum again. Gracious, to think of my big brother actually sailing away to help build the Panama Canal! I have a great deal of confidence in you, Walt, and I'm sure you will succeed, though you are inclined to be careless and you never would keep your bureau drawers in order. I suppose I shall have to write a poem, 'Lines to a Wandering Brother.' It must not be mournful, must it? I will cling to the lofty idea that you have gone to serve your country in peace instead of war."

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"That will do for you," was Walter's laughing comment. "Please let mother and father have the floor."

"It sounds fantastic, but—" doubtfully began Mr. Goodwin.

"But it is utterly out of the question," his wife emphatically concluded. "Why, this working his way in a ship sounds dreadfully rough and dangerous. The captain may intend to kidnap him. What is it they do to sailors, Horatio? Something horrid and Chinese—shanghai or hong-kong them, or whatever it is."

Not in the least perturbed by this harrowing suggestion, Eleanor excitedly announced:

"I have seven dollars of my own saved up, Walt. I was planning to take a correspondence course in the art of writing perfectly good poetry, but I'd rather invest it in you. We women must arm our heroes for the fray."

"I am afraid I could not give you the funds you would need," soberly observed Mr. Goodwin. "You must not find yourself adrift in a strange land."

Walter walked across the room, a fine, ath-

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letic figure, almost a six-footer. He felt sure that he could fight his way on the wonderful Isthmus, where there were quick promotion and high wages and a square deal for every man.

"If I can work my passage down there, I can work it home again," he cried. "But I'm not worrying about that."

"Wolverton is no place for you," declared his father. "Mother and I will talk it over, Walter, and I shall find out what I can. You have made us feel rather dizzy. We can't realize that you are no longer a little boy."

"My Salem great-grandfather went to sea when he was fourteen and was mate of an East-Indiaman at my age, and captain of her at twenty-one," stoutly quoth Walter.

"And be sure to write just how the Southern Cross looks to you," earnestly put in Eleanor.

CHAPTER II

THE PARROT AND THE BROOMSTICK

THE steamer *Saragossa* was sliding across a tropic sea where the trade-wind blew cool and steady to temper the blazing sun, the flying-fish skittered from the lazy swells like flights of silver arrows, and the stars by night seemed very bright and near. On the shady side of the promenade deck a boyish-looking member of the crew was scrubbing rust spots from the planking with a certain gusto which distinguished him from the so-called seamen, who were a sorry lot. The rough company and bullying usages of the forecastle had not dismayed Walter Goodwin, who forgot discomfort in the thought that, day by day, he was nearing the magical Isthmus. His parents' consent had been won and this was his great chance.

By far the most interesting passenger was the soldierly gentleman with the close-cropped white hair, the quiet voice, and pleasant smile

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who walked the deck with the vigor of youth. This was actually Colonel Gunther himself, chief engineer of the Canal, chairman of the Isthmian Commission, master of forty thousand workers, the man who had made a success of the gigantic task after others had failed.

"We folks think he is the biggest man in the world," a quarter-master's clerk told Walter. "He just holds the whole job together. You can *feel* him from one end of the Zone to the other. Whenever he goes to the States, it seems as if the organization began to wobble a mite."

"But he is as courteous and kind to everybody on board as if he didn't amount to shucks," was Walter's comment. "Why, he even says 'Good-morning' to me!"

It happened on this day that Colonel Gunther halted near the industrious Walter and his scrubbing-brush. Several children tagged after him, and he was telling them a most fascinating story about a giant so enormous that he could dig a Panama Canal with a poke of his finger and then drink it dry at one gulp. Presently the audience scampered off to view a distant ship, and Colonel Gunther conversed

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with one of his staff. They discussed problems of their work, and Walter was guilty of dawdling, but, alas, what he overheard came as a shock that filled him with uneasy forebodings.

"The organization has been at last recruited to its full working strength," said the Colonel. "It begins to look as if the hardest part of the job had been accomplished—to get enough good men and keep them."

"I presume the news will be published in the States," observed the other. "It would be a pity to have any more Americans coming down on the chance of finding places."

"Yes, notification was to be sent out from Washington this week. There are plenty of tropical tramps and beach-combers in Colon and Panama without adding to the number."

With a most melancholy demeanor, Walter Goodwin, ordinary seaman, went forward as eight bells struck the dinner-hour. His excellent appetite had vanished. The opportunity for a "husky young fellow" seemed to have been knocked into a cocked hat. Because he was such a very young man, his emotions were apt to veer from one extreme to the other. He was

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ready to believe the worst, nor did he dream of accosting Colonel Gunther and pleading his own special case. A fellow couldn't help standing in awe of one whom the whole Isthmus regarded as "the biggest man in the world." The enchanted land of Panama had suddenly become unfriendly and forbidding. He feared that he was about to become that dismal derelict, a "tropical tramp."

"This is the toughest kind of luck," he said to himself. "They are actually warning Americans away from the place."

Captain Bradshaw, strolling through the ship on a tour of inspection, noticed the gloomy young seaman and kindly inquired:

"Lost anything? You can't be sea-sick in weather like this."

"I have lost my job," mournfully answered Walter.

"Lost it before you found it, eh? What kind of a riddle is that?"

Walter briefly and bitterly explained, at which Captain Bradshaw was moved to suggest:

"If I could shove Colonel Gunther overboard, accidentally on purpose, and you hopped

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after him and saved him from a watery grave, what? He would simply have to offer you a good position."

"But I can't swim well enough. You will have to think of something else."

"Well, you can stay in the ship, and I will try to make an able seaman of you."

With a flash of his former determination Walter flung back: "Thank you, sir, but if I don't go ashore and try my luck, I shall feel like a yellow pup, whipped before I start."

At the boyish bravado of this speech Captain Bradshaw replied, with an air of fatherly pride:

"I should think less of you if you decided to stick in the ship, my lad. But if you find yourself flying distress signals, you are welcome to work your passage home with me."

Walter nodded and swallowed hard. He saw that if he whimpered or hung back he would lose the respect of this indomitable old sea-dog. Homesickness afflicted him for the first time, and now and then he regretted having met the persuasive Jack Devlin.

Perhaps because he was unhappy himself Walter felt sympathy for the young man from

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the republic of Colombia whose name was on the passenger list as Señor Fernandez Garcia Alfaro. He had often lingered near the fore-
castle, as if disliking the company of his fellow-voyagers, and seemed to enjoy chatting with Walter, who found him rather puzzling. The South-American temperament was new to the sturdy young Anglo-Saxon from Wolverton, who had been trained to hide his feelings.

Señor Fernandez Garcia Alfaro wore his emotions on his sleeve. He was easily excited and his outbursts of temper seemed childish, although he had been to school and college in the United States and was now in the diplomatic service of Colombia, attached to the legation at Washington. To Walter he seemed much younger than his years. He had found much to annoy him during the voyage of the *Saragossa*, but Walter refused to take his troubles seriously until matters suddenly came to a head.

It was early in the morning, and Walter had finished his share of washing down decks under the critical eye of the Norwegian boatswain. Alfaro came out of his state-room and paced the wide promenade. His demeanor was cheer-

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ful and he appeared to have forgotten his irritation.

As he halted to greet Walter, there came from an open window near by the harsh, screaming accents of a parrot which cried jeeringly:

“Viva Roosevelt! Viva Panama! Pobre Colombia! Pobre Colombia! Ha! Ha! Ha!”

Fernandez Garcia Alfaro spun round to glare at the disreputable bunch of green feathers which, from its gilded cage, continued to cackle its sentiments concerning “Poor Colombia” with diabolical energy. The young man’s black eyes flashed astonishing wrath and hatred, and Walter Goodwin, watching the tableau with a perplexed air, said laughingly:

“Anything personal in the parrot’s remarks?”

Alfaro shook both fists at the offending bird and passionately answered in his fluent English:

“It is an insult to me and my country. It is meant to be the worst kind of an insult. I will kill the cursed parrot before I leave this ship. I am a Colombian, as you know. My father is a minister of the government. Panama was stolen from my country to be made into a republic. It was a revolution? Bah! Non-

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sense! The soldiers of Colombia could have stopped that little revolution, quick. It was your Teddy Roosevelt, it was your Uncle Sam with the Big Stick that prevented us. Colombia weeps, she is disgraced, when she thinks of Panama."

"But you ought not to be sore on the silly parrot," sagely replied Walter, trying to fathom what appeared to him as an absurd situation. "I never happened to read much about Colombia's side of the story, but the Panama Canal had to be built, you know, and I guess your country was like the grasshopper that sat on the railroad track."

"Grasshopper!" and Alfaro was in more violent eruption than ever as he strode hastily aft to get away from the parrot. "You do not understand, Goodwin. You Yankees can never, never understand. That parrot belongs to a Panamanian—to General Quesada, the big, yellow, fat man whom you have seen on deck. He made himself prominent in the revolution against Colombia, but he is no good. He is a tin soldier. He had taught his parrot to insult my country, to have fun with my honor. He has

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laughed at me all the voyage. He had made the others laugh at me. It is dangerous to make me so mad."

Walter began to comprehend. He had heartily disliked General Quesada on sight, and he had heard something of the coarse teasing to which Alfaro had been subjected.

"I suppose that is why you have flocked by yourself," he replied. "But you ought not to be so touchy."

At this moment General Quesada himself came waddling on deck, parrot-cage in hand, evidently intending to give his accomplished pet an early morning airing. He was a gross, ungainly man, heavy of countenance. At sight of the indignant Alfaro he shook with laughter and prodded the bird with his finger, which prompted it to screech:

"Viva Panama! Pobre Colombia! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

The young man whom he had enjoyed taunting as a diversion of the voyage retorted with fiery Spanish abuse, which made the Panamanian scowl as if he had been stung by something sharp enough to penetrate his thick hide.

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He uttered a volley of guttural maledictions in his turn, and was echoed by the blackguardly parrot. For Fernandez Garcia Alfaro this was the last straw. His inflammable temper was ablaze. He rushed at the corpulent general and let his fists fly against the full moon of a countenance.

Before Walter Goodwin could interfere, the Panamanian had found room to jerk a small automatic revolver from a pocket of his trousers. Alfaro caught a glimpse of the weapon and tried to grip the arm that flourished it. The decks were otherwise deserted at this early hour and duty called Walter to attempt the rôle of peacemaker. This was a difficult undertaking, for Alfaro, active as an angry jaguar, persisted in fighting at close range with hands and feet, while the bulky Panamanian twisted and wrenched him this way and that, and vainly tried to use his weapon.

There was no pulling them apart, and the swaying revolver was a menace which made Walter dive for a deck-broom left against the rail. The heavy handle was of hickory. Swinging it with all his might, Walter brought it down with a terrific thump across the knuckles

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of General Quesada, who instantly dropped the revolver. Walter's blood was up and he intended to deal thoroughly with this would-be murderer. Whacking him with the broom-handle, he drove him, bellowing, toward the nearest saloon entrance, while Alfaro danced behind them, shouting approval.

By now the first mate came charging down from the bridge. Captain Bradshaw arrived a moment later, clad in sky-blue pajamas, his bare feet pattering along the deck. He picked up the revolver, eyed Walter and the broom-handle with a comical air of surprise, and inquired:

"Who started this circus? Is it a revolution? I shall have to put a few of you fire-eaters in irons."

The parrot had rolled into the scuppers, cage and all, and its nerves were so shaken that it twisted its favorite oration wrong end to, and dolefully and quite appropriately chanted at intervals:

"Viva Colombia! Pobre Panama!"

Captain Bradshaw aimed an accusing finger at the bird and exclaimed:

"Shut up! You talk too much."

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"That was the whole trouble, sir," said Walter, wondering whether he was to be punished or commended. "General Quesada brought this—this broom-handle on himself. He was trying to shoot Señor Alfaro."

"I need no diagrams to tell me that Señor Alfaro sailed into him first," said the captain. "This had been brewing for some time. I shall have to investigate after breakfast."

A little later Walter discovered Fernandez Garcia Alfaro seated upon a hatch-cover forward. At sight of his Anglo-Saxon ally the impulsive Colombian sprang to his feet and cried, with outstretched hands:

"You have saved my life! I shall never forget it, *mi amigo*. I have hated the North Americans, but my heart is full of affection for you."

Rather taken aback by this tribute, Walter said in a matter-of-fact manner:

"You surely piled into that fat general like a West India hurricane. I'm glad I spoiled his programme."

Alfaro's expressive face was vindictive as he exclaimed: "I have not finished with him and his infernal parrot!"

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"Pooh, forget him," carelessly advised Walter, to whom this threat of vengeance sounded theatrical. "Better steer clear of this Quesada person. He looks to me like an ugly customer."

Alfaro smiled rather sheepishly as he remarked:

"It was not very diplomatic? You must think I am a funny diplomat, Goodwin."

"Well, I never happened to meet one before," confessed Walter, returning the smile, "and I had an idea that diplomats were not quite so violent and sudden in their methods."

"It was that beastly parrot," began Alfaro in a quick gust of anger; but he checked himself with a shrug and asked a question which led Walter to reply:

"Oh, no, I am not a real sailor. I am going to the Isthmus to work in the Canal Zone."

Boyish pride made him reluctant to confess how dubious he was of finding work. Alfaro was so full of affectionate admiration that he was ready to believe great things of Walter, and he exclaimed:

"I am sure you will have a fine position. I knew you were not a common sailor. You are

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working your passage as a lark? I have been wishing landslides and yellow-fever and all kinds of bad luck to the Yankees so they could never finish the canal. But now, for your sake, my feelings are different."

Walter had begun to be fond of the fiery Colombian who was so quick to express his likes and dislikes.

"Thank you," he replied. "I hope we shall run across each other on shore."

"I must wait a week for my steamer from Panama down the west coast," said Alfaro. "I am going home on leave of absence from the legation to see my father and mother. I will say nothing about the row with General Quesada. My father would not think it diplomatic. I will find you at your office in the Zone?"

"I certainly hope so," gravely answered Walter, but for reasons known to himself he failed to mention his address.

The interview was cut short by a summons from Captain Bradshaw, who wished to see Goodwin at once. He climbed to the bridge-deck and entered the captain's room, cap in hand.

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"Don't look so scared, young man. I'm not going to eat you alive," was the good-humored reassurance. "General Quesada came boiling up here just now and demanded that I lock you up and turn you over to the Panamanian police when we dock at Colon. Of course I told him that the deck of this ship is American territory and he was talking foolishness."

"But *he* is the man who ought to be locked up," protested Walter. "What about his trying to shoot Señor Alfaro?"

"I said as much, but he didn't listen. He swore he pulled the revolver merely to frighten the Colombian. And then he says you whanged daylight out of him with a club. I had to talk Spanish with him and I missed some of his red-hot language."

"Yes, sir, I whanged him good and plenty," declared Walter, "and he yelled and ran for all he was worth."

"The ship's doctor had to bandage his knuckles," resumed Captain Bradshaw with a chuckle, "and there is a welt on his jaw, and he is marked in various other places. What hurts him worst is that a common sailor, and a boy

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at that, chased him from the deck with a broomstick and battered him all up. This Quesada poses as a military hero in Panama, you understand, and plays a strong hand in the politics of that funny little republic."

"Perhaps I ought not to have hit him so hard," and Walter looked solemn.

"You were a bit overzealous, but he deserved a drubbing. I just want to give you a bit of friendly advice. Don't let this General Quesada catch you up a dark alley. His vanity is mortally wounded, and he carries a deck-load of it. A Spanish-American might as well be dead as ridiculous. And it makes Quesada squirm to think how he will be laughed at if this story gets afloat in Panama. He doesn't love you, Goodwin."

"But the Canal Zone is part of the United States. He can't do anything to me," said Walter.

"Not in the Zone, but it is the easiest thing in the world to drift across the line into Colon or Panama before you know it. And the Spiggoty police, as they call 'em, like nothing better than an excuse to put a Yankee in jail."

Elated that Captain Bradshaw's attitude

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should be so friendly, and flattering himself that with so humble a weapon as a broomstick he had vanquished a real live general, Walter was inclined to make light of the warning. In fact, he forgot all about the humiliated warrior a day or so later when far ahead of the *Saragossa* a broken line of hills lifted blue and misty. Yonder was the Isthmus which Balboa had crossed to gaze upon the unknown Pacific, where Drake and Morgan had raided and plundered the Spanish treasure towns, and where in a later century thousands of brave Frenchmen had perished in their futile tragedy of an attempt to dig a canal between the two oceans.

Soon the low-roofed city of Colon was revealed behind the flashing surf, the white ribbon of beach, and the clusters of tall palms. From the opposite shore of the bay stretched the immensely long arm of the new breakwater, on top of which crawled toy-like engines and work-trains. What looked like a spacious, sluggish river extended straight inland toward the distant ramparts of the hills. On its surface were noisy dredges, deep-laden steamers, and tow-boats dragging seaward strings of barges heaped high with rock and dirt. This was part of the

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Panama Canal itself, the finished section leading from the Atlantic, and where the hills began to rise a great cloud of smoke indicated the activities of steam-shovels, locomotives, and construction plants.

Walter Goodwin, no longer brooding over his fear of becoming a "tropical tramp," was impatient to see the wonderful spectacle at close range. After the steamer had been moored at one end of the government docks of Cristobal, he was assigned to duty at the gangway while the passengers filed ashore. Conspicuous among them was General Quesada, his right hand bandaged, his surly face partly eclipsed by strips of plaster, his gait that of one who was stiff and sore.

He balked at sight of the steep runway from the deck to the wharf, and Walter offered him a helping hand. The general angrily waved him aside and muttered something in Spanish which sounded venomously hostile. Fernandez Garcia Alfaro, who was within ear-shot, explained to Walter:

"He says he will find you again, and he swears it in very bad language."

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"Pooh! I'm not afraid of the fat rascal," carelessly returned Walter. "I guess Uncle Sam is strong enough to look after me."

Before noon he found himself in the modern American settlement of Cristobal, among clean, paved streets whose palm-shaded houses, with wide, screened porches, were of uniform color and design. Boys and girls were coming home from school, as happy and noisy as Walter was used to meeting them in Wolverton. As he wisely observed to himself, this agreeable place was where the Americans lived, not where they worked, and a fellow had to find work before he could live anywhere. He was among his own countrymen, but where was there any place for him? He felt friendless and forlorn.

Strolling at random, he was unaware that he had crossed the boundary line into the Panamanian city of Colon until the streets became a wonderfully picturesque jumble of Spanish-speaking natives clad in white duck and linen, chattering West India negroes, idling Americans in khaki, and sailors from every clime.

Passing the city market, he thriftily bought his supper—bananas, mangoes, and peppery

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tamales—at cost of a few cents, and pursued his entertaining tour of sight-seeing. It was all strange and fascinating and romantic to his untutored eyes. His wanderings were cut short at sight of General Quesada, who was seated at a table in front of a café with several friends. Two of these were in uniform adorned with gold lace and buttons.

Walter wasted no time in wondering whether these were officers of the army or the police. The battered general was pointing him out to them with a gesture of his bandaged hand. The officers stared as if to be sure they would know him again. Hastily deciding that the climate of Cristobal might be healthier, Walter retreated toward the Canal Zone and the shelter of the stars and stripes. As he glanced over his shoulder, the three men at the café table appeared to be discussing him with a lively interest which made him feel uneasier than ever. Perhaps the warning of Captain Bradshaw had not been all moonshine. It looked as if General Quesada were still thinking about that terrible broom-handle which had bruised his pompous pride as severely as his knuckles.

CHAPTER III

WITH THE DYNAMITE GANG

WHAT he had heard Colonel Gunther say on shipboard made Walter think it useless to apply for one of those wonderful positions at seventy-five dollars a month on the "gold roll," which the steam-shovel man, Jack Devlin, had painted in such glowing colors. He must try to get a foothold somewhere, no matter how humble it might be, and hope to win promotion. It was really a case of jumping at the first chance to earn a dollar. Without employment what money he had would soon be spent, and then he must slink home in the *Saragossa*.

He picked his way through a net-work of tracks, switches, and sidings among the busy wharves and warehouses of Cristobal. This was the nearest scene of activity, although it seemed to have very little to do with digging the Panama Canal. There were railroad yards at home, reflected Walter, and he had seen

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miles of warehouses and wharves along the water-front of New York. He walked rather aimlessly beyond the crowded part of Cristobal, hoping to find steam-shovels and construction gangs.

At length his progress was blocked by the wreckage of several freight-cars which were strewn across the tracks in shattered fragments. Negro laborers were clearing away this amazing disorder, which could have been caused by no ordinary collision. In answer to Walter's questions one of them said:

"Dynamite, boss. A car got afire down by de ship, sah, an' de mens tuk all de dynamite out 'cept two boxes. An' when dey was runnin' de car up here in de yard to fotch it away from de wharf, she done 'plode herself to glory."

"Anybody killed?"

"Two mens, sah, an' some more is in de hospitubble."

"Too bad, but there is something doing here," said Walter to himself. "This is a hurry-up job, and perhaps they can use another man."

Climbing over the débris, he accosted a lean,

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brick-red American with a fighting jaw who was driving the wrecking-crews at top speed.

"I am not the superintendent," was the impatient reply, "but I'll save you the trouble of looking him up. He is taking no more men on the gold roll. The railroad has been laying people off."

"But I am not looking for a job on the gold roll," stubbornly returned Walter. "I am ready to pitch in with your laborers. Can't you take me on to help clear this mess?"

"For twenty cents an hour? You're joking," snapped the foreman. "White men don't do this kind of work down here."

Walter was for continuing the argument, but the other jumped to adjust the chains of a wrecking-crane. Just then there appeared a man of such a calm, unhurried manner that he seemed oddly out of place in this noisy, perspiring throng. As Walter brushed past him the placid stranger drawled:

"These tracks will be cleared by night. The job won't last long enough for you to make a start at it. Are you really looking for hard work at silver wages?"

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"Please lead me to it," gratefully cried Walter. "I guess I can live on twenty cents an hour until something better turns up."

"Good for you," said the unruffled gentleman. "I am Mr. Naughton, in charge of the dynamite. We use eight hundred thousand pounds a month on the canal. I have a ship to unload, and the negroes have been panicky since the explosion this morning. Several of them quit me, and I guess they are running yet."

Walter shied like a frightened colt, and stammered with sudden loss of enthusiasm:

"A whole s-ship-load of d-dynamite? You w-want me to help handle it?" Then he grinned as his sense of humor overtook his fright. He had just fled from Colon at sight of General Quesada and his friends. This was hopping from the frying-pan into the fire with a vengeance.

"What if I drop a box of it?" he asked.

"I am not hiring you to drop it," was the pensive answer of Mr. Naughton, as he flicked a bit of soot from his white serge coat and caressed his neatly trimmed brown beard. "I

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wish I had something better to offer you. I like your pluck."

"I am not showing any pluck so far," confessed Walter. "You have scared me out of a year's growth. But I'm willing to take a chance if you are."

"Then come along with me to the Mount Hope wharf, and I'll put you on my pay-roll."

The weather was wiltingly hot for one fresh from a northern winter, but as Walter followed his imperturbable employer he felt the chills run up and down his spine. The sight of the havoc wrought by two boxes of dynamite was not in the least reassuring.

"Here is where I get scattered all over the tropical landscape," he said to himself. "A greenhorn like me is sure to do something foolish, and if I stub my toe just once, I vanish with a large bang."

He might have taken to his heels but for the soothing companionship of Mr. Naughton, who was humming the air of a popular song and seemed to have not a care in the world. Ahead of them lay a rusty tramp steamer flying a red powder-flag in her rigging. A few laborers

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and sailors were loafing in the shade of the warehouse. At a word from Mr. Naughton they filed on board, some to climb down into the hold, others to range themselves between an open hatch and the empty freight-cars on the wharf.

Walter pulled off his shirt, gingerly tightened his belt, and took the station assigned him on deck. Presently the men below began to pass up the heavy wooden boxes from one to another until the dangerous packages came to Walter, who was instructed to help carry them to the ship's side.

He eyed the first of them dubiously for a moment, took a long breath, and clasped the box to his breast, squeezing it so tightly that he was red in the face. Lifting his feet very high and setting them down with the greatest caution, he advanced with the knee action of a blue-ribbon winner in a horse-show. Quaking lest he trip or stumble, he delivered the box to the man at the gangway. The seasoned handlers chuckled, and Mr. Naughton said to the American who was checking the cargo:

“I took no risks in picking up that youngster,

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even if he is a new hand with the powder. His nerves haven't been spoiled by rum or cigarettes. Nice, clean-built chap, isn't he? What do you think of him?"

"He is no stranded loafer or he would sponge on the Americans in Colon sooner than work on the silver roll."

"I shall ask him a few questions when we knock off," returned Naughton.

After Walter had safely handled a score of boxes, he gained confidence and worried less about "'splodin' himself to glory," as he toiled to keep pace with the other men. The humid heat was exhausting, but as the afternoon wore on his efficiency steadily increased. When the quitting hour came, Mr. Naughton told him:

"I'll be glad to keep you on until the cargo is out. Where are you living?"

"Nowhere at present. I can't afford to go to a hotel, and even if I had the price I am afraid Colon might disagree with me."

"Oh, it is a healthy town nowadays. Our people have cleaned it up like a new parlor."

"I mean the police—" began Walter, but this sounded so suspicious that he blushed,



Lifting his feet very high and setting them down with the greatest caution

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thought it hardly worth while explaining, and concluded, "I guess I can find a bed somewhere."

Mr. Naughton whistled, cocked a scrutinizing eye, and observed:

"So you got into trouble with the Spiggoty police? Anything serious? I won't give you away."

"Nothing against my morals," smiled Walter.
"My manners were disliked."

"I'll take your word for it. One of my minor ambitions has been to punch the head of a Panamanian policeman. The chesty little beggars!" drawled Mr. Naughton. "You don't belong with the laborers, Goodwin, and you wouldn't like their quarters. I can find you a place to sleep at our bachelor hotel, and you can get commissary meals at thirty cents each. Uncle Sam is a pretty good landlord."

Cordially thanking him, Walter exclaimed as he straightened his aching back:

"I haven't been as lame and tired since I pitched a twelve-inning game for the high-school championship of the State. Phew! I must have moved enough dynamite already to

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blow Colon off the map. But I'll be glad to report in the morning, sir."

This casual reference to base-ball had a most surprising effect upon the placid Mr. Naughton, who had seemed proof against excitement. He jumped as if he had been shot at, grasped Walter by the arm, and shouted eagerly:

"Say that again. Can you pitch? Are you a real ball-player? Man alive, tell me all about it!"

Walter stared at the "powder man" as if suspecting him of mild insanity.

"We have a crack nine in Wolverton for a high-school," he replied. "It is a mill town, you see, and most of the fellows begin playing ball on the open lots as soon as they can walk. We were good enough last season to beat two or three of the smaller college teams."

"And you were the regular pitcher?" breathlessly demanded Mr. Naughton, as he backed away and surveyed the broad-shouldered youth from head to foot.

"Yes, I pitched in all the games."

"Well, you handle yourself like a ball-player, and I believe you are one. You come along to supper with me."

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“But what in the world—” began the bewildered Walter.

“Leave it to me. Your destiny is in my hands,” was the mysterious utterance of Mr. Naughton.

In the cool of the evening they sat and ate at their leisure on the breezy piazza of the “gold employees” hotel. From other small tables near by several men called out greetings to Naughton, who beckoned them over to be presented to his protégé. No sooner had they learned that the tall lad was a base-ball pitcher of proven prowess than they became effusively, admiringly cordial. In fact, Walter held a sort of court.

“Goodwin is one of my unloading gang on the dynamite steamer,” explained Naughton.

At this there arose a fiercely protesting chorus. One might have thought they were about to mob the “powder man.”

“How careless, Naughton! It makes no difference about you, but we can’t afford to risk having a ball-player blown up.”

“A real pitcher is worth his weight in gold just now.”

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"It won't do, Naughton, old man. If you permit this valuable person to be destroyed, the Cristobal Baseball Association will hold you responsible."

"Don't you dare let him go near your confounded dynamite ship again."

Thanks to the magic of base-ball, although he could not understand the why and wherefore of it, Walter found himself no longer a friendless waif of fortune, but regarded as something too rare and precious to be risked with a dynamite gang. It seemed rather absurd that these transplanted Americans should have any surplus energy for athletics after the day's work in the steaming climate of the Isthmus. But his new friends proceeded to enlighten him, led by Naughton, who exclaimed with much gusto:

"My son, we *eat* base-ball. The Isthmian League is beginning its third season, and you have alighted among the choicest collection of fans, cranks, and rooters that ever adorned the bleachers. Mr. Harrison here is captain of the Cristobal nine. Our best pitcher went back to the States last week."

"But I'm afraid I shall have no time to play,"

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said Walter. "I didn't come down here for base-ball."

"Oh, we all work for a living. Don't get a wrong impression of us," put in Harrison, a young man of chunky, bow-legged type of architecture whom nature had obviously designed for a short-stop. "I am a civil engineer, Atlantic Division. I used to play at Cornell. We can't practise much, but if you want to see some snappy games——"

"I would rather handle the dynamite than umpire when you play Culebra or Ancon," broke in Naughton, who showed signs of renewed excitement as he went on to say to Harrison:

"If I bring Goodwin to the field at five o'clock to-morrow afternoon, will you furnish a catcher and give him a chance to limber up? Better lay off and take it easy for the day, hadn't you?" he added, turning to Walter.

"No, the hard work will take the kinks out of my muscles, and I can't afford to lose any time on my first job."

"Oh, hang his tuppenny job!" spoke up one

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of the company. "He doesn't understand how important he is. Enlighten him, Harrison."

"This frenzied person on my right means to convey that a young man with a first-class pitching arm will have the inside track with the powers that be," explained the Cristobal captain. "There is Major Glendinning, for instance——"

"He is head of the Department of Commissary and Subsistence," chimed in Naughton. "He feeds and clothes the whole Canal Zone. When Cristobal makes a three-bagger he jumps up and down and yells himself hoarse."

"But I heard Colonel Gunther himself say that no more Americans were needed down here," said Walter.

"That doesn't mean there is to be no more weeding out of undesirables," Naughton explained. "There is still room on our happy little Isthmus for a man who can deliver the goods. I don't want you to infer that the government is hiring ball-players. But as an introduction, Goodwin, you couldn't beat it if you brought letters from eleven United States senators."

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"Now let's talk base-ball," impatiently interjected a lathy individual in riding breeches and puttees, who had come in from a construction camp somewhere off in the jungle.

"We ought to tuck our prize package in bed very early," objected Naughton. "He is as sleepy as a tree full of owls."

"Juggling dynamite is no picnic!" and Walter struggled with a yawn. His friends good-naturedly escorted him to the bachelor quarters, where he speedily rolled into his cot and dreamed of fighting a duel with General Quesada, the weapons being base-ball bats.

When he reported on board the dynamite ship next morning, Naughton greeted him with a slightly worried air and declared:

"I have been thinking it over and perhaps those chaps were right. We have very few accidents with the stuff, but we ought not to run the slightest risk of losing the league championship to Culebra or Ancon."

Walter laughed and replied:

"This is the best kind of practice for me. If I can keep my nerve and make no errors, I am not likely to be rattled when the bases are full."

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This argument had weight, although Naughton was still anxious as he strolled to his office. By noon the stiffness had been sweated out of Walter's back and shoulders, and the supple vigor was returning to his good right arm. Shortly before five o'clock the inconsistent Naughton, who lived in daily peril of his life with all the composure in the world, was fairly fidgeting to be off to the base-ball field. A battered victoria and a rat of a Panama pony hurried them thither, and they found Harrison and several other players busy at practice against a background of cocoanut palms and bread-fruit trees.

The Cristobal catcher trotted up looking immensely pleased:

"Hello, Goodwin, you don't know me," said he, "but my kid brother was on that Elmsford freshman team that you trounced so unmercifully last season. I saw the game. Brewster is my name. When Harrison told me he had been lucky enough to discover you, I chortled for joy."

This was a cheering indorsement for the others to hear and it gave Walter the confidence

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of which he stood in need. A great deal appeared to depend on his pitching ability, and this test was more trying to the nerves than handling dynamite or dodging General Quesada.

The catcher tossed him a ball and they moved to one side of the field. At first Walter pitched with caution, but as he warmed to his work the ball sped into Brewster's glove with a wicked thud.

"Send 'em along easy to-day. Better not overdo it," the catcher warned him. Walter smiled and swung his arm with a trifle more steam in the delivery. He felt that he must show these friendly critics what he had in him, wherefore the solid Brewster withstood a bombardment that made him grunt and perspire. The other players looked and whispered among themselves with evident approval.

"What did I tell you?" proudly exclaimed Naughton. "Am I a good scout? I unearthed this boy phenomenon."

The battery had paused to cool off when a big-boned American saddle-horse came across the field at an easy canter. The rider sat as erect as a cavalryman, although he was old

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enough to be Walter's grandfather. Halting beside the group, he said:

"I rode out this way on the chance of seeing a bit of practice. Do you expect to whip those hard-hitting rascals from Culebra?"

"Good afternoon, Major Glendinning," replied Naughton, with a wink at the others. "Harrison has been feeling very gloomy over the prospects. We lost our only first-class pitcher, you know."

"What an outrageous shame it was!" earnestly ejaculated the head of the Department of Commissary and Subsistence.

Harrison nudged Naughton. Major Glendinning had come upon the scene at precisely the right moment. Here was the employer who, above all others, must be made to take an interest in Goodwin's welfare if these amiable conspirators could bring it about. Noting that Walter was beyond ear-shot, Harrison spoke up.

"Sorry you couldn't arrive a little sooner, Major. We are inclined to think we have found a better pitcher, though I'm not at all sure that we can keep him at Cristobal."

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The elderly gentleman leaned forward in the saddle and eagerly inquired:

"Bless me, is that true? I swear you don't look at all gloomy, Harrison. Who is he? Where is he? And you think he can pitch winning ball for Cristobal?"

"Yes, sir. Brewster has seen him play at home. He is one of your born pitchers. He is a wonder."

"What do you mean by saying we can't keep him?" demanded the major.

"He is working for me—on the silver roll," vouchsafed Naughton, with a hopeless kind of sigh. "He hasn't been able to find anything better to do. But I can't hold him, of course. He is a first-class man in every way. He is likely to quit almost any day and drift over to Culebra or Ancon, where he will be sure to land a position on the gold roll, as foreman, clerk, or time-keeper. And then he will be pitching for our hated rivals."

"Um-m, he will, will he?" and Major Glendinning fairly bristled. "I am not letting any good men get away from my department. Show him to me."

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Naughton nodded in the direction of Walter, who was deep in a discussion of signals with his catcher. Then the "powder man," with Harrison as fluent ally, paid tribute to the manly qualities of the young pitcher, nor were their motives wholly selfish. The major listened attentively, chewing his gray mustache, and now and then glancing at Walter with keen appraisement. At length he exclaimed:

"You chaps know how to get on my blind side. I have had my eye on a cheerful young loafer in the Cristobal commissary who is not earning his salary. If he should—er—resign, there might be a vacancy. I like Goodwin's looks. Fetch him over here, if you please."

Naughton and Harrison grinned at each other as they marched to the side of the field and escorted Walter with great pomp of manner. The abashed pitcher wiped his dripping face and heard Major Glendinning say to him:

"You had better not think of leaving Cristobal just now. It is the best place in the Zone. When you are through with Naughton and his infernal cargo, come and see me in my office, if he doesn't blow you sky-high in the mean-

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time. And don't forget that I expect you to win that next game against Culebra."

He wheeled his horse sharply and trotted from the field, leaving Walter to gaze after him with a dazed, foolish smile. Harrison thumped him on the back and jubilantly shouted:

"Wasn't that easy? What did we tell you?"

"But do you honestly think he has any intention of giving me a job on the gold roll?" tremulously implored Walter, whose emotions were in a state of tumult.

"Sure thing," said Naughton. "He can always find a place for a young fellow with the right stuff in him."

"'A husky young fellow with the right stuff in him,'" echoed Walter. The familiar words had come home to roost.

"He will start you in at seventy-five per month"—this was from Harrison—"and you will have to earn it. Base-ball cuts no figure with the major in business hours."

"Your conscience can rest easy on that score," added Naughton. "No danger of your cheating Uncle Sam."

"An honest pull is the noblest work of man,"

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declaimed Harrison, and this seemed to sum up the whole matter.

When Walter returned to his quarters, his first impulse was to write a letter home. This proved more difficult than might seem. To report to his anxious parents and his adoring sister that he was employed on board a dynamite ship would not tend to ease their minds. He could imagine this bit of news landing in the cottage at Wolverton with the effect of a full-sized explosion. Eleanor would probably take her pen in hand to compose a metrical companion piece of "The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck."

"I must be tactful," frowningly reflected Walter. "I don't want to make them nervous. Perhaps I had better not go into details. I will simply say that I have a fairly lucrative position. Twenty cents an hour isn't much down here, but it sounds big alongside that four-dollar-a-week job in the hardware store."

Then he discovered that to discuss the better position which he had not yet secured was to raise hopes that sounded fantastic. Those rival ball-players from Culebra might knock

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him out of the box in the first inning. This would mean good-by to Major Glendinning's favor. Base-ball cranks were fickle and uncertain persons. Walter therefore merely informed the family that the climate agreed with him and he was sure his judgment had been sound in coming to the Isthmus.

"Between unloading dynamite and worrying about this base-ball proposition," he soliloquized, "not to mention the fact that General Quesada is camping on my trail, I expect to be gray-headed in about one more week."

CHAPTER IV

A LANDSLIDE IN THE CUT

THE dynamite ship had been almost emptied of cargo, when Naughton suggested:

“I won’t need you on this job after to-day, Goodwin. Why not go to Culebra with me to-morrow morning and see some of the canal work? I shall have to inspect the dynamite stored in the magazines.”

Walter jumped at the chance of a holiday before venturing to interview Major Glendinning. He was eager to behold the famous cut where they were “making the dirt fly,” and to find his friend Jack Devlin, the steam-shovel man who had beguiled him to the Isthmus.

It was with a sense of wonderment as keen as that of the early explorers that Walter was whisked in a passenger train, as if on a magic carpet, into the heart of the jungle, past palm-thatched native huts perched upon lush green hill-sides, by trimly kept American settlements,

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by vine-draped rusty rows of engines, cars, and dredges long ago abandoned by the French.

Soon there appeared the mighty Gatun dam and locks flung majestically across a wide valley, resembling not so much man's handiwork as an integral part of the landscape, made to endure as long as the hills themselves. Upon and around them moved in ceaseless, orderly activity a multitude of men and battalions of machines, piling up rock and concrete.

Walter drew a long breath and exclaimed, his face aglow:

"It makes me sit up and blink. Is there anything bigger to see?"

"The Gatun locks alone will cost twenty-five million, not to mention the dam," replied the practical Naughton, "but Culebra Cut is the heftiest job of them all. It broke the poor Frenchmen's hearts and their pocket-books."

They came at length to this far-famed range of lofty hills which link the Andes of South and Central America. Leaving the train, Naughton tramped ahead toward the gigantic gash dug in the continental divide. Clouds of gray smoke spurted from far below, and the earth trembled

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to one booming shock after another. Dynamite was rending the rock and clay, and Walter realized, with a little thrill of pride, that he had been really helping to build the Panama Canal.

Presently he stood at the brink of this tremendous chasm. It seemed inadequate to call it a "cut." He gazed down with absorbed fascination at the maze of railroad tracks, scores of them abreast, which covered the unfinished bed of the canal. Along the opposite side, clinging to excavated shelves which resembled titanic stairs, ran more tracks. Beside them toiled the steam-shovels loading the processions of waiting trains.

No wonder Jack Devlin, engineer of "Number Twenty-six," had swaggered across the deck of the *Saragossa*. He knew that he was doing a man's work. To tame and guide one of these panting, hungry monsters was like being the master of a dragon of the fairy stories. There could be no Panama Canal without them. Intelligent, docile, tireless, they could literally remove mountains.

Walter sat upon a rock and watched one of them nudge and nose a huge boulder this way

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and that with its great steel dipper, exactly as if it were getting ready to make a meal of it. Then the mass was picked up, swung over a flat-car, swiftly, delicately, precisely, and the huge jaws opened to lay down the heavy morsel. Walter decided that he wanted to be a steam-shovel man. Naughton had to speak twice before the interested lad heard him say:

"I shall be busy for some time, and may have to jump on a work-train as far as Pedro Miguel station. Go down into the Cut, if you like, and look around."

"Thanks. Say, Mr. Naughton, how old must a man be to run a steam-shovel?"

"They break them in as firemen. Are you tough enough to shovel coal all day? Don't let these Culebra tarriers coax you away from us. You are scheduled to play ball for Cristobal, understand?"

By means of several sections of steep wooden stairs Walter clambered to the bottom of the cut, and dodged across the muddy area of trackage to gain the nearest bank upon which the steam-shovels were at work. Fascinated, he halted to watch one of them at closer range.

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A noise of shouting came from several laborers who were running along a track further up the steep slope. The nearest steam-shovels blew their whistles furiously. The shrill blasts were sounding some kind of warning and Walter said to himself:

“Naughton’s men must be ready to set off a blast. I guess I had better move on.”

He started to follow the fleeing laborers when a mass of muddy earth came slipping down a dozen yards in front of him. It blocked the shelf upon which he had climbed, and he checked himself, gazing confusedly up the slope. A large part of the overhanging hill-side appeared to be in sluggish motion. The wet, red soil far up toward the top of the cut had begun to slide as if it were being pushed into the bed of the canal by some unseen force. Dislodged fragments of rock rolled down the surface of the slide and clattered in advance of it, but so deliberate was the movement of the mass that there seemed to be time enough to escape it.

Walter ran along the ties and began to plough knee-deep through the impeding heap of muddy

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tenacious clay on the track. He glanced upward again, halted irresolutely, and gasped aloud:

"Great Scott, here comes a whole train of cars falling downhill."

The landslide had started just beneath the uppermost shelf of excavated rock, and the line of track supported thereupon was almost instantly undermined. The rails tilted and slipped with their weight of rock-laden cars before the engine could drag them clear. The train crew jumped and managed to crawl to the firm ground at the crest of the slope a moment before the flat-cars toppled over and broke loose from their couplings. Then the cars hung for an instant, spilled their burden of rock, which made a little avalanche of its own, and rolled down the slope with a prodigious clatter.

At this new peril, Walter knew not which way to turn. He could not be blamed for losing his presence of mind. The cars parted company, taking erratic courses, tumbling end over end. One of them bounded off at a slant to fall in front of him, while another was booming down to menace his retreat. All this was a matter of

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seconds, precious time that was wasted for lack of decision.

Instead of making a wild dash in one direction or the other, Walter danced up and down in the same spot, his eyes fairly popping from his head. The result was that, by a miracle of good fortune, the flat-cars roared and rattled past on either side and left him unscathed.

Then the huge, loosened layer of earth, moving with lazy momentum, filled the ledge on which he stood, brushed him off, and carried him down the slope. To his amazement he was not wholly buried, but rolled over and over, now on the surface, now struggling in a sticky smother of stuff that held him like a fly in a bed of mortar. A projecting stratum of rock, not yet blasted away, checked the leisurely progress of the mass before it reached the bottom of the cut.

Plastered with mud from his hair to his heels, bleeding from a dozen scratches, his clothes in rags, Walter was quite astonished to find himself alive. He was stuck fast in clay almost to the waist and so dazed and breathless that he was unable to call for help.

Glancing stupidly up the slope, he beheld a

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steam-shovel sway and totter. Nothing could surprise him now. With languid interest he watched the towering machine turn over on its side in a leisurely manner and then come slipping down to the next shelf. It resembled some prehistoric monster with a prodigiously long neck, which had lost its footing.

It came to rest on its side and out of one of the cab windows spilled a large man in overalls who tobogganed down the miry slope with extraordinary velocity, arms and legs flying.

He fetched up within a few yards of Walter, sat up, wiped the mud from his eyes, and sputtered:

“Poor old Twenty-six! She’s sure in a mess this time.”

Recognizing Jack Devlin, Walter managed to find his voice and called feebly:

“Is this what you call a great place for a husky young fellow?”

The steam-shovel man scrambled to his feet, active and apparently unhurt, as if such incidents were all in the day’s work. Plunging through the débris of the slide, he peered into Walter’s besmeared and bleeding countenance.

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The voice and the words had sounded familiar and assisted identification.

"Well, I'll be scuppered!" roared Jack Devlin. "Goodwin is your name. You took my advice and beat it to the Isthmus. I'll have you out of this in a jiffy."

A gang of laborers arrived a moment later, and with Devlin shouting stentorian orders, their shovels speedily and carefully dug out the hapless Walter. They were about to carry him to the nearest switch-tender's shelter when he groaned protestingly:

"Ouch! Don't grab my right arm. It hurts."

Battered and sore as he was, all other damage was forgotten as he tried to raise the precious right arm, his pitching arm, the mainstay of his fortunes on the Isthmus. An acute pain stabbed him between wrist and elbow. He murmured sorrowfully:

"It is broken or badly sprained. I'm not dead, but I certainly am unfortunate."

"Those that try to stop a landslide in the Cut are generally lugged out feet first," cheerfully remarked Devlin. "The landscape isn't

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fastened down very tight. Were you looking for me?"

"Yes. And I found you, didn't I?" Walter grinned as he added: "We were thrown together, all right."

They made him as comfortable as possible, while Devlin forgot his sorrow over the plight of his beloved "Twenty-six."

"I feel sort of responsible for you, Goodwin," said he. "I'm going to put you in the hospital car of the next train to Ancon, where they'll give you the best of everything. I can't go with you, but I'll try to see you to-night. I must boss a first-aid-to-the-injured job on that poor old steam-shovel of mine. She looks perfectly ridiculous, doesn't she? Now, cheer up."

The American hospital buildings at Ancon are magnificently equipped, and their situation along the windy hill-side commands a memorable view of the gray old city of Panama, the wide blue bay adorned with islands, and the rolling Pacific. To Walter Goodwin the place seemed like a prison, and he awaited the surgeon's verdict with the dismal face of a man about to be sentenced. The sundry cuts and

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contusions were of small account. A few days would mend them. But his aching, disabled arm was quite a different matter.

"You were born lucky or you would be in the morgue," said the genial young surgeon of the accident ward.

"I am damaged enough," sighed Walter.
"What about this arm?"

"No fracture. A severe wrench that will make it pretty sore for a month or so."

"A month or so!" and Walter winked to hold back the tears. "Why, I have to pitch a game of ball with this arm next week."

"Nothing doing," decreed the surgeon. "You had better stay here for two or three days and we'll try our best to patch you up in record time. Do you want to notify any friends?"

"Yes, indeed," cried Walter. "Please send word to Mr. Harrison, captain of the Cristobal nine."

"'Bucky' Harrison?" The surgeon showed lively interest. "Then you must be the new pitcher for Cristobal. We heard about you. You are in the enemy's camp, but we will treat you kindly."

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Having been tucked in bed, Walter felt that he was a perfectly useless member of society. The landslide had wiped out his bright expectations. Major Glendinning could have no possible interest in a pitcher with a crippled arm. When dismissed from the hospital he would be unable to earn his food and lodging even as a laborer. As for his brave plan of helping the dear household in Wolverton, he might have to beg aid from them.

Jack Devlin appeared after supper. His manner was contrite and subdued as he sat down by the cot and strongly gripped Walter's sound hand.

"You and I were sort of disorganized there in the Cut," said he. "I had no chance to find out how things have been breaking for you. Have you landed a job? What about it?"

Walter ruefully related the story of his pilgrimage. At the episode of the parrot and broomstick, the steam-shovel man violently interrupted:

"General Quesada? I know who he is—a gambler, and a grafter, and a fake soldier. He trimmed some friends of mine, but never mind

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that. He is a large, fat, false alarm. Forget him."

When informed of the base-ball episode, he shook his head disapprovingly.

"You ought to have given Culebra first chance at you," he expostulated. "Maybe we could have found you a job. I am catcher of the Culebra nine, do you see?"

"I'd rather be fireman of a steam-shovel than anything else in the world," Walter eagerly exclaimed.

"You will not be fit to handle a shovel or a base-ball for some time, my boy. We will not let it come between us, but I'm sorry you tied up with those low-browed pirates at Cristobal. Need any money? Want to write a letter home?"

"I am all right for the present, Mr. Devlin. And I think I'll wait a day or so before writing the folks."

"You told me when we met on the ship that you were anxious to give your father a lift. It made a great hit with me. What about that?"

"I guess I was like General Quesada's parrot,

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I talked too much," confessed Walter. "I shall be lucky if I can take care of myself."

Devlin was silent for a moment. Then he bade the patient farewell with words of rough and hearty encouragement and departed from the ward, a big, masterful man with a hard fist and a soft heart. As he walked across the hospital grounds he repeated under his breath:

"He aimed to give his father a lift. The pluck of him! 'Tis a pity that more men on the Isthmus are not thinking about the old folks at home. 'Tis a safe bet that his father needs a lift. The lad looked very solemn about it."

He turned into the hospital superintendent's office and asked a clerk for Walter Goodwin's home address, which the rules required to be recorded. Then he made a détour to the Ancon post-office, smiled craftily, and demanded a money-order application blank. Separating several bills from a wad crumpled in his trousers pocket, he reflected:

"He would fly off the handle if I suggested anything like this, being a most independent young rooster. But I used to have a daddy of

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my own. I'll say nothing about it till the lad gets a job. Then he can square it."

Thereupon he wrote to Mr. Horatio Goodwin as follows:

DEAR SIR:

Your son will be unable to attend to his affairs for a few days, so I am sending the enclosed amount which had been advanced against his salary account.

Yours truly,

JOHN DEVLIN.

P. S.—He is in the Ancon Hospital, a bit mussed up but nothing serious. He will write soon.

"There! I may be guilty of committing something or other under false pretences, but I feel a whole lot easier in my mind," quoth the steam-shovel man.

Next morning that bland dynamite expert, Naughton, came to the hospital to show Walter that his friends in Cristobal had not forgotten him.

"What about the base-ball practice?" demanded the patient. "Have you found another pitcher?"

"No. We haven't given you up as a total loss."

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"Does Major Glendinning know I have been put out of commission?" Walter's voice was very anxious.

Naughton smiled broadly.

"Yes. I saw him just after your message came to Harrison yesterday afternoon. There is no finer man on the Isthmus than the major, but he is a trifle unreasonable at times. He was so upset at the notion of playing Culebra without you that he got peevish and blamed me for letting you wander into that landslide. And then he sailed into you for being too slow to get out of the way of it."

"Then he will have nothing more to do with me," was Walter's mournful conclusion.

"You are not fit to do anything just now," evasively returned Naughton. "The major's bearings are heated, but he will cool down. He took a fancy to you. Now what can I do for you? You will soon be on your feet again and going strong. Need any money?"

Walter flushed and his lip quivered. Jack Devlin had asked the same question. These were friends worth having.

"I can get along somehow," he bravely answered.

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Naughton exclaimed reprovingly:

"None of that. We folks on the Isthmus are one big family. You have made good. Don't worry about your meal-ticket after you leave the hospital. You may need some spare change for clothes and so on. I'll leave a few dollars with the nurse."

"But I don't deserve all this kindness."

"Nonsense. What else?"

"I think I had better send a letter home to-day. I feel more like it now. May I dictate it to you, Mr. Naughton?"

"Sure thing. But don't let the folks infer you are down and out. Tell 'em about the scenery."

"If the scenery would only stay put, I shouldn't be in the hospital," was the patient's comment.

Naughton chewed his pencil until Walter began:

MY DEAREST FAMILY:

I have had a slight accident, so I cannot very well use my right hand. I have the very best of care, and everybody is just bully to me.—

He stared at the ceiling and confided to Naughton:

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"I am stumped. You see, it is hard to explain things. I was so cocksure of myself—and—and—I was going to find a good position right away, and it hurts a fellow's pride like the mischief to own up that he was all wrong. And I don't want them to worry——"

Naughton nodded gravely and suggested:

"Shall I tell them about your impressions of the canal? You are right. We ought to send them no hard-luck stories."

"Go ahead, then. My first impressions were dents. I'm covered with them. You know more about the canal than I do."

Naughton scribbled industriously, and the patient seemed pleased with the results.

"Harrison will be over to see you soon," said the amanuensis. "You are going to help us dig the Big Ditch, so keep your nerve. Good-by and good luck until next time."

Walter was a low-spirited and restless patient. Now and then he forgot his troubles in chatting with the other men who had been brought into the accident ward. They had been wounded on the firing-line of this titanic conflict with Nature. Like good soldiers they

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were eager to be up and at it again. They worked and dared for something more than wages. They manifested intense pride and loyalty. It was their ambition to "stay with the job." Their talk was mostly of progress made, of new records set. Their spirit thrilled Walter, it was so fine and clean and worthy of the flag they served.

After three days the surgeon examined him carefully, and announced:

"You are fit to leave us, but you must take it easy. And that arm should be looked after. What are your plans?"

"I haven't any. I am not a canal employee, so I suppose I can't go to a commission hotel."

"Naughton or Devlin will be here to see you again," said the surgeon. "Why not bunk with me for a few days? I am in bachelor quarters. You don't want to wait around in one of those Panama hotels. They are fierce."

Walter thought of the vengeful General Quesada and had no desire, in his disabled condition, to linger in the city of Panama, beyond the Canal Zone. He gratefully accepted the surgeon's invitation and added:

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"I should like to go out this afternoon and see something of Ancon."

"Very well. It will brace you up to get outdoors. If you want the good salt wind, why don't you run over to Balboa docks? It is only a trifling journey by train. And you can see the Pacific end of the canal. It's a busy place."

The railroad station was no more than a few minutes' walk down the hill from the hospital, and Walter footed it slowly, feeling weak and listless. He enjoyed the brief trip to Balboa and his first glimpse of the shipping of the Pacific. The wharves were American, but the high-sided steamers crowded bow and stern were bound to strange, romantic ports, to Guayaquil and Valparaiso and around the Horn, to Mazatlan and Acapulco.

Picking his way among the jostling, noisy gangs of black laborers, Walter perched himself upon a bale of merchandise under the long cargo shed. The wharf was not large enough for its traffic. Freight of every description covered it. Tally clerks, checkers, and foremen were at their wits' ends to keep the streams

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of boxes, barrels, and crates moving with order and system.

At one berth a Pacific mail-boat from San Francisco was discharging supplies for the Canal Commission. Just beyond her, one of the Chilean Navigation Company's fleet was filling her holds for the long voyage down the west coast. Against her seaward side, as if waiting for room at the wharf, was moored a rusty little coastwise steamer flying the flag of the Panama Republic.

During a summer vacation from high-school, Walter had worked in the shipping-rooms of the Wolverton Mills. He knew something about this activity on the wharf. He thought himself capable of tallying freight and sorting consignments. Sharp-eyed and interested, he watched the hurly-burly of hard-driven industry. Presently he noticed something which awoke his curiosity. It seemed extremely odd.

The freight trundled out of the Pacific mail-boat was piled compactly between two narrow aisles or runways on the wharf, convenient for transfer to the freight-cars of the Panama Railroad. Walter noted the marks on the boxes,

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because most of the stuff was consigned to the "Dept. of Commissary and Subsistence," and he was thereby reminded of Major Glendinning.

Separated from this great heap of merchandise only by a runway was the freight that was being rushed into the outward-bound Chilean steamer. A negro halted his truck between the two piles and loaded it with cases marked for Major Glendinning's department. Then he went clattering at full speed to the gangway of the Chilean steamer.

Evidently the thick-witted laborer had made a blunder, thought Walter. He had loaded his truck at the wrong side of the runway. At the gangway of the South American vessel was stationed a "checker," one of the white employees of the Zone, whose business was to discover just such mistakes as this. Walter saw him halt the truck, glance at the marks on the boxes, and then shove the negro along into the ship instead of turning him back to the wharf.

Walter did some rapid thinking. He was enough of a shipping-clerk to surmise that something was wrong. It might have been carelessness, but he eyed the checker suspiciously. He

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was a long, stooping young man with rather pallid, sullen features, and he conveyed an impression of slouchiness and dissipation quite unlike the clean-cut type of the average American in the Zone.

Walter disliked him. Perhaps this was why he was unwilling to give him the benefit of the doubt.

The checker forsook the gangway, hurried into the runway where the truckmen were passing in procession and gave them an order, roughly, with a gesture which carried a meaning to the vigilant Walter. They were told to continue shoving the merchandise consigned to Major Glendinning's department into the Chilean steamer. They viewed any white man as a "boss" to be obeyed. Unable to read the marks, they did as they were ordered, without hesitation.

The checker ran back to the gangway, where he made pretence of examining each arriving truck-load and passing it as O.K. Walter was convinced that he had stumbled on a flagrantly crooked transaction. It looked barefaced and bold, but it was actually much less so than ap-

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peared. In the rush and confusion of the wharf, one dishonest checker could engineer the business with small risk of official detection. The merchandise would be missed later, but what proof was there that it had been slipped aboard the Chilean steamer?

"It was one chance in a hundred that I happened to see it," said Walter to himself. "I'm sure the checker is a rascal, but there must be others in it, or how can the stolen goods be received and disposed of at the other end of the voyage?"

He forsook his place of observation and moved cautiously nearer the Chilean steamer, screened from the observation of the checker by a huge crate of machinery. There he discovered, to his great surprise, that the trucks loaded with pilfered merchandise were being wheeled across the lower deck, through the open cargo port on the other side, and into the small Panamanian coaster tied up to the larger steamer.

This altered the circumstances. Very likely the Chilean officers and crew knew nothing about the shady business. The Panamanian

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craft might have been courteously permitted to take on part of her cargo by transferring it across the intervening deck.

Walter tingled with excitement. The checker must have an understanding with the captain or owner, or both, of the disreputable-looking little steamer hailing from Panama. Her destination could not be far distant. She could be overhauled at short notice. Instead of informing the American officials at Balboa, Walter swiftly decided to try to unravel the plot by himself. It would show them that he was good for something besides base-ball. And it might mean solid recognition. But there was something bigger than his own interests at stake. The spirit of the Canal Zone had taken hold of him. He knew that "graft" had been kept out of the organization. To have the fair record blotted, even in the smallest way, was hateful to him. He was as jealous of the honor of the "Big Ditch" as Colonel Gunther himself.

CHAPTER V

TRAPPED IN OLD PANAMA

WHILE Walter Goodwin was watching and waiting on the wharf the checker at the gangway suddenly became wary. He stormed among the laborers and abused them for blundering, turning them back with their truck-loads of commissary stores and otherwise imitating a man honestly doing his duty. Walter was uncertain whether the checker had spied him and taken alarm, or whether some one in authority had moved inconveniently near.

The little Panama steamer into which the stolen merchandise had been conveyed was making ready to cast loose and haul out into the stream. Walter feared she was about to sail and carry with her all his hopes of distinguishing himself as an investigator. He was elated, therefore, when a man of whom he had caught a glimpse on the vessel's bridge came on the wharf and halted to speak to the checker.

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The twain were together for several minutes. Walter had time to study the new-comer.

He was no longer young, bearing marks of hard living, but of an alert, resolute mien and rugged frame. He was a German, perhaps, certainly not a Spanish-American. He resembled not so much a seafarer as one of those broken soldiers of fortune, grown gray in adventures, to be found in ports of the uneasy republics near the equator, ripe for bold and unscrupulous enterprises and ready to serve any master.

These two were birds of a feather, thought Walter, and he must somehow find out why they flocked together. Guesses were not proof. He could follow the checker after the day's work was done and try to discover where he went and whom he met.

Presently the older man returned to the steamer. Then Walter's train of thought was derailed by a cordial voice and outstretched hand which belonged to his shipmate of the *Saragossa*, Señor Fernandez Garcia Alfaro.

"I have been to the hospital to see you, my dear friend," cried the Colombian diplomat. "I

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read it in a newspaper that you had a fight with a landslide. Ah, you are as strong as a brick house to be out so soon. The arm? Alas, is it serious?"

"It will cripple me for base-ball for a while."

"Ah, you plucky Yankees! You are always thinking of your grand sport of base-ball."

"I thought you had sailed for home," said Walter.

"My steamer had a break-down of her engines. She has not yet arrived from the south. My father has arranged by cable to have the Chilean ship touch at my port on her voyage to Valparaiso. She sails in three days more. I have come to Balboa to see the captain. Will you go on board with me?"

They climbed to the upper deck and while Alfaro did his errand, Walter leaned overside and gazed down at the small Panamanian steamer, whose name he discovered to be *Juan Lopez*. She was a dirty, disorderly vessel, and the crew, of all shades from black to white, looked as if some of them might be hanged before they were drowned.

No cargo was strewn about. Everything

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fetched from the wharf had been instantly hidden under the hatches. The man who had conferred with the checker came out of the cabin, glanced up, halted, and stared hard at Walter. When Alfaro returned, he asked him excitedly:

“Do you know anything about this *Juan Lopez* steamer alongside? And have you ever seen that man with the gray mustache before?”

“Yes, I have heard of the *Juan Lopez*. She made trouble on the coast of Colombia one time. It was a filibustering expedition, but they were not able to make a landing. That man? It is Captain Brincker. I was in Guayaquil when he got into some kind of a row with the government. Why do you ask with so much interest, Goodwin?”

“Oh, I was just curious,” said Walter, unwilling to confide in the talkative, impulsive Colombian. “I suppose the *Juan Lopez* has reformed, or she would not be loading freight at Balboa.”

“She is maybe trading on the Panama coast and up the rivers. Will you come back to Ancon with me and dine at the Tivoli Hotel to-night?”

“Thank you, but I can’t promise for sure,”

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said Walter. "I have some business on the wharf. Will it be all right if I telephone you by seven o'clock?"

"Certainly," exclaimed Alfaro. Curious in his turn, he asked: "Is your office on the wharf?"

"It is under my hat at present," smiled Walter. "Does this Captain Brincker live in Panama?"

"I will ask my friends in the city and tell you all about him at dinner. I think he is a hard customer."

"I have reasons for keeping an eye on him, so I'll be grateful for any information," said Walter.

The Colombian was in haste to keep an engagement, and he left Walter impatiently awaiting the next turn of events. The *Juan Lopez* moved away from the side of the Chilean steamer and anchored far out in the bay. Shortly thereafter a small boat was sent ashore. It landed near the wharf and Captain Brincker disembarked. He walked in the direction of the railroad station.

A few minutes later, the checker left the gang-

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way and also headed for the station. Walter followed them into a train for Ancon, but they did not sit together, and paid no attention to each other. This was unexpected. When they left the train, the slouchy, ill-favored young man climbed into a cab, while the grizzled soldier of fortune sturdily set out on foot into Panama city.

Walter had fought shy of invading Panamanian territory because of General Quesada and the native police, but he could not bear to quit the chase. He straightway chartered a cab and made the Spanish-speaking *cochero* understand that he was to follow the chariot aforesaid. The weary, overworked little horses jogged slowly through the picturesque streets of balconied stone houses and mouldering churches and ramparts recalling the storied age of the *Conquistadores*. Old Panama and the Canal Zone, side by side, vividly contrasted the romantic past and the practical, hustling present.

The cab of the checker passed the plaza with its palms and flowers, and made toward the city water-front. The narrow streets framed bright glimpses of the blue Bay of Panama. At

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length Walter bade his *cochero* halt. The slouchy young man whom he was pursuing had dismissed his vehicle and was entering a large weather-worn house of stucco, one of a solid block in a little thoroughfare close to the crumbling sea-wall.

"It is my business to find out who lives there," reflected Walter. "I'm sure that Americans from the Canal Zone are unlikely to have honest errands in this corner of Panama."

He forsook his cab and walked slowly along the street. The row of houses resembled an extended wall of stone pierced by windows and doors. It was puzzling to make certain into which of them the suspected young man had gone. Walter counted the doors from the corner to verify his observation and paused to scan the entrance, hoping to find a street number or name-plate.

He might ask questions of a policeman, but this was impracticable for three reasons: first, he could not speak Spanish; second, he had no fondness for Panama policemen; third, there was no policeman to be found. Feeling rather foolish, he waylaid a barefooted boy and fished

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for information with earnest gestures, but the youngster shook his head and fled into the nearest alley.

"I should have brought Alfaro with me," sighed Walter. "I am as helpless as a stranded fish. These people ought to be compelled to learn English."

Still standing in front of the house and wearing an absent-minded, worried manner, Walter had forgotten for the moment that he was playing a game which required wit and vigilance. From around the nearest corner, no more than a few yards away, appeared the robust figure of Captain Brincker. At sight of the youth with the bandaged arm, he stopped in his tracks, muttered something, and gazed with open unfriendliness.

Intuition told Walter that this formidable man had better be avoided. He felt like taking to his heels, but he was boyishly reluctant to show the white feather. Undecided, he failed to retreat until it was too late.

Captain Brincker advanced swiftly, confronted him, and asked in a heavy voice:

"Were you looking for somebody?"

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"Yes, but I don't need him just now," stammered Walter, trying to brazen it out. "Another time will do just as well, thank you. I must be going."

"Wait a minute," growled the soldier of fortune, and he grasped Walter's left arm with a grip of iron. "I have seen you at Balboa this afternoon, on the wharf, on the Chilean steamer, on the train. Are you not old enough to mind your own business?"

Not yet recovered from the battering effects of the landslide, Walter lacked his normal strength and agility, and his disabled arm made him as helpless as a child. He dared not try to wrench himself free lest it be injured afresh in the tussle.

"You can't scare me with your bluffs," he angrily retorted. "What right have you to ask my business?"

"We will discuss that. And if you are not willing to talk, I may have to hold you by the *right* arm."

Walter winced at this and looked up and down the street. Brown, naked children were playing in the gutters. Fighting-cocks were tethered

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to the iron railing in front of a near-by dwelling. A black-haired young man with a chocolate-drop complexion, lounging on a balcony, lazily thrummed a guitar. Strolling pedlers cried their wares with rude snatches of song. The voices of fishermen came from the beach by the sea-wall. The place was wholly foreign, unfrequented by Americans. The Canal Zone and its protecting power might have been a thousand miles away. The passers-by would be pleased to see Walter worsted in a scuffle. His affairs concerned them not in the least. It was futile to call for help. He had been rash and stupid.

"What do you want to say to me?" he demanded, trying to keep his voice under control.

"It is not hospitable to make you stand in the street," and Captain Brincker smiled grimly. "Come inside with me."

As he spoke he twisted Walter violently about and shoved him into the vestibule of the house, which was only a step from the street. Jerking himself free in blind rage, Walter struck at his captor, who dodged and slammed shut the heavy outer door behind them. It was like

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being in a prison. Walter moved aside, trying to guard the injured arm.

"You are excited. I do not wish to be brutal," said Captain Brincker. "You are very easy to handle. You will be foolish if you object."

He showed the way with a courteous gesture. A long hallway led to the *patio* or open court in the centre of the house. It was like a tropical garden roofed by the sky. Gorgeous flowers bloomed, and a fountain tinkled pleasantly. Walter followed in glum silence. He had been caught like a rabbit. Frightened as he was, the fact that he belonged to the race dominant on the Isthmus helped to steady him. He felt that he must play the game to the finish without flinching. He held himself erect, his chin up.

Captain Brincker offered a wicker chair and seated himself in another. Then he scrutinized his unwilling guest with grave deliberation. His face was rather questioning than hostile. The suspense made Walter's heart flutter. The masterful personality of the soldier of fortune held him silent. At length Captain Brincker said:

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"You were watching the young man at the gangway. You wanted to know all about me and the *Juan Lopez*. You were overheard talking to Señor Alfaro. You followed the young man to this house. I want to know who is employing you to do all this."

The quiet demeanor of the speaker helped Walter to regain his self-confidence. If he could keep his head he might be able to extricate himself.

"Nobody employed me. I had nothing better to do," he truthfully replied. "Aren't you taking a lot for granted? I am just out of the hospital and looking for a job. I don't look like a very dangerous person, do I?"

"That depends," slowly spoke Captain Brincker. "You may be merely meddlesome. Do you want to go home to the States? The passage can be arranged, and some extra money for your pocket. There is a condition—"

"That I keep my mouth shut," hotly retorted Walter. He turned very red. His temper got the better of him. He was not old enough and wise enough to fence with such a

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situation as this. With reckless, headlong candor, he burst out:

"You are offering me hush money. It's a crooked, dirty proposition. And I won't stand for it. I know you were in the scheme to steal commissary stores from the wharf——"

Walter checked himself, aghast that he should have said so much and thereby delivered himself into the enemy's hands. The effect of this speech upon Captain Brincker was extraordinary. He pulled at the ends of his gray mustache as if greatly perplexed, winked rapidly, and stared with an air of blank amazement:

"Steal the commissary stores?" he echoed. "I have been called many hard names, young man, but I plead not guilty this time. Now that you have begun, will you be so good as to let the cat all the way out of the bag?"

It was Walter's turn to feel bewildered. Captain Brincker's denial carried conviction. It impressed Walter as genuine. Perhaps his conjecture had been wrong. At any rate, the checker was guilty, and why had the two of them come straight to this house from Balboa?

"I suppose I'm in serious trouble now,"

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stubbornly answered Walter, "but I won't take back what I said. The *Juan Lopez* has a lot of freight on board that doesn't belong there, and I intend to find out all about it."

Captain Brincker leaned forward in his chair, his strong, brown hands resting upon his knees, his keen eyes almost mirthful.

"You are frank with me," said he. "We are at cross-purposes, you and I. I give you my word of honor as a soldier that I know nothing whatever about this stolen freight. It is safe to tell you the truth, because I cannot let you go free until after the *Juan Lopez* sails. I am not her captain. I am in charge of the expedition. There may be a change of government in San Salvador very soon. Perhaps I shall assist. The plans are in the hands of my employer, in whose house you have the honor to be."

"Then it is a filibustering expedition," cried Walter, all interest and animation. "And you are going to mix up in another revolution? Whew, but I wish you would take me with you."

"With your arm in a sling? Besides, my em-

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ployer detests Americans. Do you believe I am telling the truth?"

"It sounds that way," confessed Walter.
"But what about that checker? He must be in the house right now."

With a shrug, Captain Brincker explained:

"He comes to see my employer. It is not my affair. I have had no words with the young man except this afternoon at the wharf. I was instructed to see that certain supplies were taken on board. I asked him about them. I did not look at the stuff. It was his business to check it up."

It was quite obvious that Captain Brincker was anxious to clear himself in the eyes of this honest, ingenuous accuser. He may have committed many a greater crime against the law, but he disliked being thought a commonplace thief.

Tempted by the amicable drift of the interview, Walter ventured a dangerous question:

"Your employer—who is he?"

Captain Brincker scowled. This was treading on forbidden ground. He may have been inwardly disgusted that the man he served should have stooped so low as to pilfer supplies

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for the expedition, but the matter was not for him to meddle with. He had an odd code of loyalty, a sadly twisted sense of honor, but such as they were he was stanch to them. He would not break with the man who had bought his sword and his services.

"My employer?" said he. "That is not for me to tell you. I shall have to lock you up for the present. It would be most unfortunate to have the expedition of the *Juan Lopez* spoiled by the tongue of a meddlesome boy. The American government would seize the ship and arrest all hands if the news leaked out. You know too much to be at liberty."

Oddly enough, Walter made no protest, nor was he any longer angry. He perceived that he had blundered into one affair while he was on the trail of another. Captain Brincker had been honest with him, discussing the situation as man to man, and he was justified in guarding the secrecy of his adventurous enterprise against discovery by the authorities. The alarming possibility was that he might think it his duty to inform his employer of Walter's knowledge concerning the stolen merchandise.

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"Are you going to report what I found out—that the commissary stores were smuggled on board the *Juan Lopez*?" asked Walter.

Before Captain Brincker could answer, there came from behind the palms at the other side of the *patio* the screeching voice of a parrot:

"*Viva Panama. Pobre Colombia. Ha! Ha! Ha!*"

Walter jumped from his chair. His cheek was quite pale. He had heard this parrot before. It belonged to General Quesada, who must be the mysterious employer. Standing in a door-way opening from another part of the house was the gross, shapeless figure of General Quesada himself, the parrot cage in his hand. With him was the slouchy young man from Balboa wharf. Before crossing the *patio* they had halted in time to hear Walter's unfortunate question.

The checker repeated it in Spanish, and General Quesada comprehended that the young seaman of the *Saragossa* who hammered him with a broom-stick had now discovered the plot to rob the American government of supplies for the filibustering expedition.

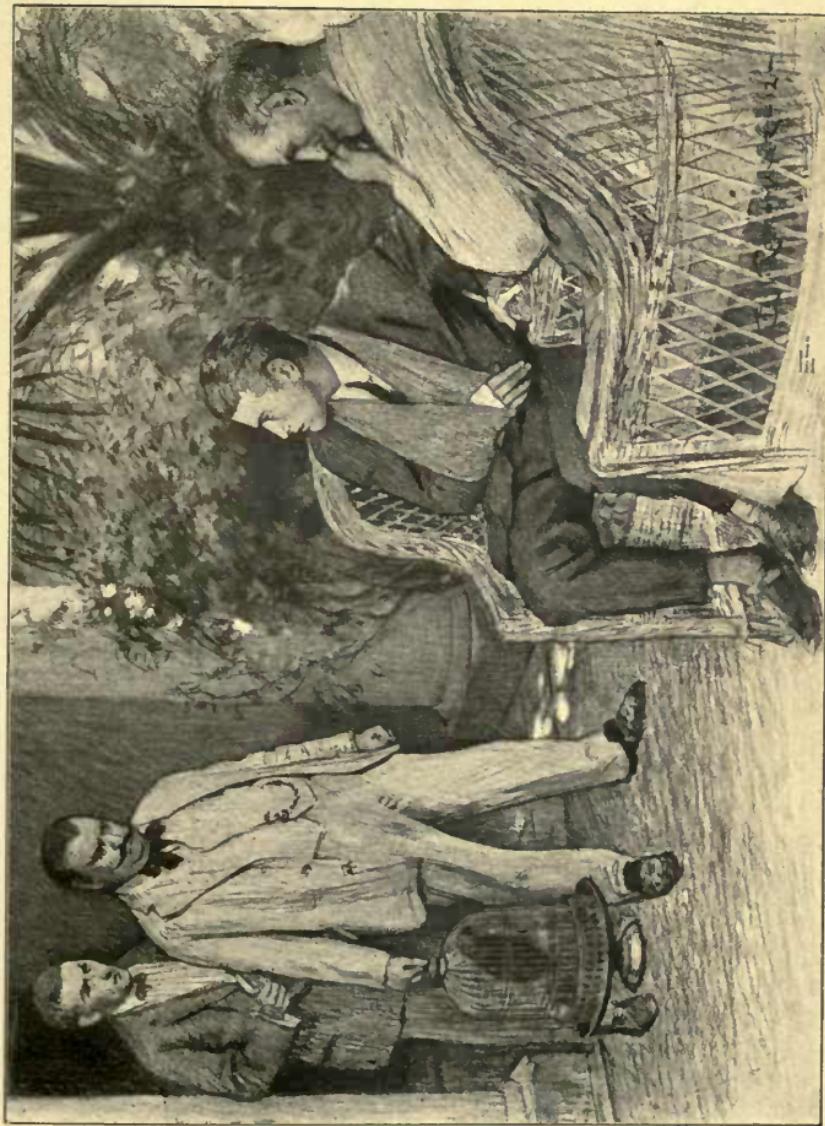
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The Panamanian glared wickedly at Walter and bellowed in Spanish a volley of questions aimed at Captain Brincker. The latter answered reluctantly. The scene was evidently distasteful to him. It was in his mind to temper the storm of wrath and hatred. But General Quesada knew that he had been found out. The checker, snarling and vindictive, was rapidly explaining that Walter had been spying at the wharf and on the train, and had followed him into Panama. Captain Brincker turned to the hapless Walter and said with a shrug:

“It is a worse fix for you than I thought. General Quesada has a terrible hatred for you because you struck him and disgraced him on the ship from New York. I had not heard of it until now. And he knows that you know too much about the business at the wharf.”

“Why don’t you help me get out of the house?” implored Walter. “You don’t seem like a coward. He looks as if he wanted to murder me. I can’t put up a fight. I am crippled.”

The soldier of fortune looked confused and



"Viva Panama! Pobre Colombia! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

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ashamed. He had never earned his wages more unpleasantly, but he made no aggressive movement. Remembering his errand, General Quesada waddled across the *patio* into the hallway and dismissed the checker. The street door slammed shut with a rattle of bolts.

"What did he say he was going to do with me?" Walter besought Captain Brincker.

"He seems very much pleased to get hold of you. I will try to cool his anger."

General Quesada returned, grunting and swearing to himself. After hanging the precious parrot cage in a tree, he dropped heavily into a wicker chair and sat staring at Walter with the most malicious satisfaction. Occasionally he chuckled as if here was a jest very much to his liking. Walter yearned for his broom-handle. He looked about for something which might serve as a weapon. Regardless of consequences, he would put his mark on the fat, ugly countenance once more.

General Quesada read his purpose and gave an order to Captain Brincker. The two captors roughly hustled Walter into a large, empty room overlooking the bay, and so close to the

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water that the flooding tide could be heard lapping against the foundation walls.

"You just wait until my government hears of this performance," cried Walter. "General Quesada will be chucked in jail, where he belongs."

Captain Brincker replied in kindly tones:
"Take my advice and do what you are told.
It is the best policy."

Left alone, Walter tried to persuade himself that no serious danger could menace him. The Isthmus was almost a part of the United States, and he was no more than a few minutes' drive from the Canal Zone, and the protection of his own people. General Quesada wished to frighten him into silence.

Walter went to one of the long windows, which was barred against harbor thieves by ornamental iron grillwork. Misty and golden in the effulgence of sunset lay the fishing-boats, the wide bay, the scattered islands, and the steamers anchored off the quarantine station. The brief tropical twilight fled, and the night came down.

After a long while a boat scraped against the

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sea-wall. He could discern it as a slow-moving shadow. Voices murmured in Spanish, an order was sharply uttered, and an oar rattled against the masonry. It did not occur to Walter that the coming of the boat had anything to do with him. He supposed that a crew of fishermen was making a belated landing.

CHAPTER VI

JACK DEVLIN IN ACTION

SEÑOR FERNANDEZ GARCIA ALFARO waited in the lobby of the Tivoli Hotel at Ancon until considerably after seven o'clock and no telephone message had come from his friend Walter Goodwin. Disappointed at having to dine alone, the Colombian diplomat wandered to the desk and again asked a clerk to make sure that no tidings had been sent him. He was possessed of an uneasy feeling that something might be wrong. He had not found time to make inquiries concerning Captain Brincker, but he wished Walter had not been so interested in keeping track of that hardened adventurer. Intrigue and mystery are native to the air of Spanish-American countries. One suspects whatever he does not understand.

Finally Alfaro drifted into the dining-room of this excellent hotel, conducted by the paternal government of the Zone, where people meet

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from all corners of the world. Soon there entered a dapper, black-eyed young dandy in evening clothes of white serge, whom Alfaro recognized as a partner of a shipping-firm in Panama, and an old acquaintance of his. Beckoning him to his own table, the Colombian warmly exclaimed:

"It is a great pleasure, Antonio. Where have you been? I have suffered a thousand disappointments not to find you."

"Business took me to Costa Rica for two weeks," replied the other. "Are you now going home or are you returning?"

"I go to see my father and mother, Antonio. I have been waiting for an American friend to dine with me. He has not arrived. I am anxious. You know everything that goes on in Panama. Tell me, what is Captain Brincker doing here? You are aware of him, of course."

"Who is not? He is a famous character. Before I went to Costa Rica the story was going around that his fortunes had picked up. He has been down at the heel for some time, you know, loafing in Panama."

"There is to be a revolution somewhere?"

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"Politics are very much upset in San Salvador. Who knows? By the way, my firm has just sold the old *Juan Lopez*. We were glad to get her off our hands, I tell you, before she sunk at her moorings. A wretched tin pot of a steamer! You are interested, because she one time figured in Colombian affairs."

"Who purchased the *Juan Lopez*?" asked Alfaro. "I saw her loading at Balboa to-day, and Captain Brincker was on board."

"The new owner is General Quesada. I wish the fat rascal no good luck with her."

"The owner is General Quesada?" loudly exclaimed Alfaro. "I am startled. And what does Captain Brincker do on board?"

"He is in the service of General Quesada, so I am told. You may put two and two together, if you like. I have learned to mind my own affairs in the shipping business of Panama. Perhaps General Quesada imagines himself to be the next president of San Salvador. He does not buy a steamer and hire a man like Captain Brincker for a pleasure excursion. Is it not so?"

Alfaro had lost his appetite. The process of

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putting two and two together filled him with alarm. His young friend Goodwin was entangling himself unawares in the concerns of General Quesada, who bore him a violent grudge. Alas, that he could not have been warned to steer clear of Captain Brincker and the *Juan Lopez!* Alfaro was a poor dinner companion for the dapper Antonio. He asked other questions and the answers were not reassuring. Quesada was said to have been gambling heavily in the disreputable resorts of Panama. Where had he found funds to finance a Central American revolution? He had stolen his provisions and the *Juan Lopez* had been sold him for a song. But guns and munitions cost a pot of money, and there were wages to pay. Probably some shady concession hunter had backed the enterprise.

All this Alfaro moodily considered until he could no longer curb his impatience.

"You will be so good as to excuse me, Antonio," said he. "I have something to attend to. The address of General Quesada's house in Panama? I wish to write it down. And you say that Captain Brincker has been living with him?"

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"Something diplomatic in the wind?" smiled the shipping merchant. "You fear the *Juan Lopez* may again annoy the politics of your fair country of Colombia?"

"No, Antonio. It has to do with a friend. He saved my life. It is better to be too anxious for such a one than too little."

"You have my approval. Command me if I can aid you. *Adios.*"

Hastening from the hotel, Alfaro took the shortest road to the Ancon hospital, for Goodwin had told him that he was staying there for the present as a guest. After considerable trouble, he found the young surgeon of the accident ward, who was off duty in his quarters.

"Yes," said he, "the base-ball pitcher with a game wing is supposed to be bunking with me, but he flew the coop this afternoon and I haven't seen him since. He said he was going to Balboa to sniff the breezes. You look worried. Anything wrong?"

"I am a little afraid for him," answered Alfaro. "He was to dine with me. I think he may have gone into Panama and got himself into trouble. He has mixed himself up with

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some people who would be very glad to do him harm.”

The surgeon looked perturbed in his turn.

“I am fond of the youngster,” said he. “He is not in fit condition to take care of himself. If you have reason to fret about him, suppose we try to look him up. Shall I telephone the Zone police department? Have you any clews?”

A solid foot-fall sounded on the screened porch, and the big frame of Jack Devlin, the steam-shovel man, loomed at the door. His pugnacious, redly tanned face beamed good-naturedly as he said in greeting:

“Howdy, Doc! I dropped in to see my young pal Goodwin, but he’s not in the ward. What have you done with him? Is he all mended?”

“We have sort of mislaid him. This is his friend, Señor Alfaro. He can explain the circumstances.”

Devlin gripped the slim fingers of the Colombian in his calloused paw and exclaimed:

“Glad to meet you. Goodwin told me how you played a star part in the one-act piece of the parrot and the broomstick. What’s on your mind?”

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"Goodwin has not come back, and we think General Quesada may have caught him in Panama."

"Quesada, eh?" and Devlin scowled ferociously. "I wouldn't mind taking a crack at that fat crook myself. What's the evidence? Put me next."

Alfaro explained in his vehement, impassioned manner, and at the mention of Captain Brincker the steam-shovel man raised a hand and interrupted:

"Stop a minute. You say you saw this gray-headed beach-comber in Guayaquil one time? So did I, my son. I know him. He is bad medicine for young Goodwin to interfere with, but he has a decent streak in him. Quesada sounds a good deal worse to me. He's a yellow pup all the way through. Come along, Señor Alfaro. Grab your hat and follow me. I need you to sling the Spanish language."

"You are going to consult with the police?" queried the Colombian.

"Not on your life. I'll round up this Quesada-Brincker outfit all by myself. I am kind of responsible for Goodwin. I feel like a godfather

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by brevet to him. It will do no harm to look into this thing. I am just naturally suspicious of Panamanians in general and of Quesada in particular. Good-by, Doc. I'll keep you posted."

They were lucky enough to find a cab in the hospital grounds and, as the *cochero* plied the whip, Alfaro added the details of his meeting with Goodwin on the wharf. Devlin listened grimly. He had become taciturn. He was no longer the jovial, swaggering steam-shovel man bragging of the prowess of "old Twenty-six" but a two-fisted American of the frontier breed, schooled to think and to act in tight places.

"I intend to get into General Quesada's house and look his game over," said he.

"But he has a revolver. He tried to kill me with it," cried Alfaro.

"Pshaw, I never found one of you Spanish-Americans that could shoot straight," was the impolite comment.

They left the cab at the nearest corner. Devlin strode ahead, Alfaro peering warily about for unfriendly policemen of the Panama

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force. In front of the house Devlin halted and said:

"You are a professional diplomat. Better stay outside and jolly the Spiggoty police if a row breaks loose inside. They will try to help Quesada. If I need you I'll sing out good and loud."

"But I am not a coward," earnestly protested the Colombian. "I am not afraid to go in with you. Goodwin saved my life. I will do anything for him."

"You do as you're told, young man, or I may get peevish with you," was the decisive reply.

Devlin rang the bell. When the door was opened by some one dimly visible in the unlighted vestibule, he demanded in very bad Spanish:

"I wish to see General Quesada. It is important."

A strong voice answered in excellent English:

"The general will not be home to-night. What is your business?"

Devlin shoved the other man aside and advanced into the hallway, at the further end of which an electric bulb was aglow.

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The other man quickly followed and locked the door behind him.

"Pretty exclusive, aren't you?" said Devlin.
"Why, hello, Captain Brincker. I'm looking
for a young friend of mine named Goodwin.
What have you done with him?"

Gazing hard at the bold intruder, the soldier
of fortune answered:

"There is no young man in the house. You
are Jack Devlin."

"Sure I am, and my belief is that you are a
liar. Do you recall the night when you broke
jail ahead of the government troops that were
going to shoot you next morning, and swam
aboard my dredge in Guayaquil harbor?"

"That revolution in Ecuador was unlucky
for me," returned Captain Brincker, in a mat-
ter-of-fact way, as if this meeting were not at all
extraordinary. "I was on the losing side. You
hid me on your dredge and kept me there until
I could slip away in a German tramp steamer.
I have not forgotten it."

Devlin stood alertly poised, his mind intent
on the main issue. If there was to be a truce
it must be on his own terms. There was con-
tempt in his eyes as he said:

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"You have fallen pretty low since then, Captain Brincker, to play jackal to this cheap bully of a General Quesada. I'm sorry I hauled you aboard my dredge. I have called you a liar. Are you man enough to resent it?"

As if his degradation had been brought home to him, Captain Brincker's deeply lined cheek turned a dull red. He had his own misguided sense of duty, however, and he was thinking of his employer's interests as he rejoined:

"That is a personal matter. You and I will settle it later. I cannot let you come into this house, do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," growled Devlin. "You're bound to earn your dirty wages. Now, what about young Goodwin? He's a friend of mine, and you know what that means."

"I can tell you nothing——"

"I'm sick of all this conversation. I can see it in your eye that you're guilty," was Devlin's quick retort. His fist shot out and collided with the jaw of Captain Brincker, who staggered back as Devlin clinched with him. Their feet scuffled furiously upon the stone floor. The struggle was waged in silence. The steam-shovel man was the younger and more ac-

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tive, and he was a seasoned rough-and-tumble fighter. A hip-lock, a tremendous heave and twist, and Captain Brincker went down like a falling tree.

Devlin sat upon his chest and searched his clothing for weapons. Finding a loaded revolver, he cocked it and allowed the vanquished soldier of fortune to rise to his feet. The victor's nose was bleeding, but he looked pleased as he gustily observed:

"Too speedy for you, eh? I hope I jolted some decency into you. I'm the boss and you'll tell me what I want to know."

Without a word, Captain Brincker walked to the *patio* and sat down with his head in his hands. The violent fall had dazed him. Devlin looked at him and said with a pitying laugh:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You used to be a good deal of a man. A bit too old for the strenuous life! Getting the best of you was like taking candy from a child. Now, I mean business. Tell me the truth, or I'll bend this gun over your head."

Like a good strategist, Devlin had taken his

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stand where he could command a view of all the entrances into the *patio*. If surprised by numbers, he intended to shoot his way out of the house.

Captain Brincker hated himself beyond words. He had wavered when he might have protected Walter Goodwin against the wrath of General Quesada. And now Devlin had made him feel utterly unmanly and despicable. It had not been a part of his trade to protect a thief and betray an honest, courageous American lad. He was in a mood to try to make amends. He was ready to haul down his colors.

"I owe you a favor, Devlin," said he, speaking with an effort. "You did me a good turn in Guayaquil harbor. And you have the upper hand. I cannot stomach this Goodwin affair. Yes, the boy came here. I meant him no harm. I was afraid he knew too much about the *Juan Lopez* expedition. I wanted to keep him quiet for a little while. But he had caught General Quesada at something worse. There was a scheme between him and an American at Balboa, a young man who had been knocking about the west coast and found a job on the

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wharf. He had gambled with Quesada and lost. The general put the screws on him."

"I heard about that to-night," impatiently broke in Devlin. "Then Quesada took Goodwin out of your hands. What has he done with him?"

"Carried him aboard the *Juan Lopez*. She is ready to sail. They are only waiting for me to come on board."

"How long will Quesada wait for you? The steamer is anchored in the bay, I suppose."

"He will not wait too long. He is afraid and suspicious. He will think the expedition has been discovered and I am in trouble. He will expect me to get away in a sail-boat and meet him at a rendezvous on the coast."

"I believe you are honest with me," said Devlin. "I can't go aboard and take Goodwin off single-handed. And neither can I trust you to see that no harm comes to him on the voyage."

"You are not fair to me," protested Captain Brincker. "I am very sorry that General Quesada got hold of him."

Devlin laughed incredulously and made an emphatic gesture with the revolver.

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"You are a desperate, broken man," he cried. "You are playing for a stake against big odds. Quesada is your boss. Once you get to sea with a ship-load of guns and cut-throat recruits and you will not let the boy stand between you and your business. You are too old a dog to learn new tricks. You mean well, but you are hard as nails. And I cannot trust you to stand up against Quesada and the rest of them to save the lad."

Captain Brincker chewed his gray mustache in silence. At length he grumbled:

"What are you going to do about it?"

Devlin was perplexed, and he cogitated at some length before declaring:

"I have the bright idea. I will hold you as a hostage. When I think of that poor crippled lad out yonder, with Quesada cooking it up in his wicked heart how he can easiest make way with him, it's a wonder I'm not mad enough to blow the head off you, Captain Brincker. You may be thankful that I'm not a violent man."

Devlin glanced into the hallway. He dared not leave his prisoner, so he gruffly ordered him

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to march in front of him. Halting inside the front door, he sang out in a tremendous voice:

“Oh, you Alfaro! Get a jump on yourself.”

The faithful Colombian heard the summons and dashed in as the door was unbolted.

“Are you killed?” he gasped.

“Not by a considerable majority, my son. Captain Brincker and I had an argument. I win. Here, don’t step between him and the gun in my fist. Do you know where to find a launch in a hurry and a man to run it?”

“Yes. My friend Antonio Varilla, who dined with me to-night, has a fast gasolene boat.”

“Can you find him to-night?”

“He was going from the hotel to the University Club of Panama to play a match at billiards. He will be there now. Tell me, where is Goodwin?”

“I’m going to send you to find him, Alfaro. My Spanish is very rocky or I’d do the trick myself and leave you on sentry duty with the prisoner. You get that launch and you look for the *Juan Lopez*, understand? She is in the bay, between here and Balboa. And you put it up to General Quesada that his right-hand

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man, Captain Brincker, is too busy looking into the muzzle of a gun to join the expedition. If Goodwin comes back with you, Captain Brincker goes free. Otherwise I'll march this gray-headed reprobate to the Ancon jail as a filibuster caught in the act. And he'll get about five years. Uncle Sam is mighty hostile to anybody who tries to touch off a revolution in these little Central American republics."

Alfaro nodded with eager approval. Here was a crafty, resourceful stratagem after his own heart. Devlin was a most admirable leader.

"I will find the launch in a hurry," said he, "and I will enjoy making a speech to General Quesada. Trust me to do my share. Shall I come back to this house?"

"Yes. I will not deprive Captain Brincker of my society. And you may tell General Quesada that I intend to camp on his trail till I get his scalp, too."

Alfaro vanished at top speed and Devlin prodded his captive back to the *patio*. Under the circumstances, the soldier of fortune was not the most entertaining company. They sat

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facing each other in the wicker chairs while the hours dragged their slow length along. The house was otherwise deserted. The servants had been dismissed earlier in the day. The thick stone walls shut out the street sounds, but the open windows overlooking the bay admitted the murmuring noise of the waves on the beach.

At length Devlin heard the staccato explosions of a launch's engine, diminishing in the distance. He hoped that Alfaro was on his way. The tense excitement of the situation had slackened. Devlin was feeling the nervous strain, and with a yawn he suggested:

"What about making some black coffee, Captain Brincker? You and I are in for a late session to-night. Shall I convoy you into the kitchen? I will poke the gun at you no more than I can help."

The prisoner complied rather grumpily. His sense of humor was in eclipse. For a compulsory cook, he brewed a most excellent pot of coffee which Devlin complimented in friendly terms. As an experienced judge of men and their motives, he observed, after reflection:

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"I do not think so harshly of you as I did. War is a cruel game, and you are too old a dog to learn new tricks, I suppose. You ought to have been caught young and tamed. I believe you had a notion of befriending the Goodwin lad."

"Thank you, Devlin. It has been a good many years since any man said as decent a thing as that about me." The fallen soldier of fortune looked his gratitude, and his face was more eloquent than his words.

A long silence fell between them. Each man was busy with his own thoughts. It was broken by Devlin.

"Quesada will not dare to knock Goodwin on the head and throw him into the bay, will he? He thinks he has kidnapped the lad without anybody's knowledge. And he has reason enough for getting rid of him."

"No. You need have no fear of that. He may plan nothing worse than to maroon him in the jungle of San Salvador."

"It would be as bad as death for the boy, and his right arm is useless."

Through the seaward windows they heard the

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distant throb of a steamer's engines, fluttering, irregular. The sound carried far across the quiet water. The two men gazed at each other.

"She makes a clatter like a mowing-machine. You could hear her for miles," said Devlin. He leaped to his feet and menaced his prisoner with the revolver. "'Tis an old, worn-out boat that makes a noise like that."

"It is the *Juan Lopez*," exclaimed Captain Brincker, and he did not flinch. "I know those engines of hers. She is outward bound. She has sailed without me."

"Who cares about you?" roared Devlin. "Alfaro failed to turn the trick. Quesada has carried young Goodwin to sea, and precious little show the lad will have for his life."

CHAPTER VII

A FAT RASCAL COMES TO GRIEF

WHEN Jack Devlin learned that the *Juan Lopez* had gone to sea, he forgot his threat of putting the soldier of fortune in a Canal Zone jail. His one concern was to rescue Walter Goodwin. The steam-shovel man had that rugged, indomitable temperament which refuses to quit as long as there is a fighting chance. Fiercely turning upon the disconsolate Captain Brincker, he shouted:

"I have no time to bother with you. You could have saved the lad, and you stood by and let Quesada carry him away. Many a man has stretched hemp for a deed less cruel. I will wait here for Alfaro. Get out of my sight. The house is not big enough for the two of us."

Without a word Captain Brincker, sorry, ashamed, and perhaps repentant, went into the street. Devlin paced the hallway like a caged

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lion, hoping against hope that Alfaro might be bringing Walter Goodwin ashore in the launch. It was after midnight when the Colombian came running into the house with only breath enough to gasp:

"The launch was a big one—General Quesada was frightened when he saw it—he thought it was from the American government, sent to catch him. They would not listen to me. The *Juan Lopez* slipped her cable and ran to sea as hard as she could."

Grasping him by the shoulders, Devlin hoarsely demanded:

"Could you tell if Goodwin was on board?"

"I called to him in English. I told him his friends would find him. I thought I heard him try to holler something, but there was much noise, the engines, and the men giving orders. They yelled to me to keep away or they would shoot."

"I guess we had better get busy and plan our campaign," said Devlin.

"What will you do? Wake up the American minister in Panama? It is now a diplomatic matter. It is an international outrage. It is

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a Panama steamer that has stolen Goodwin, and General Quesada belongs to the republic."

"Oh, shucks!" drawled the steam-shovel man. "Do you know what that means? Cabling to Washington and enough red tape in the State Department to choke a cow. And delay to drive you crazy. And what becomes of Goodwin in the meantime?"

Rather chagrined to hear diplomacy dismissed so scornfully, Alfaro timidly ventured:

"The civil administration of the Canal Zone?"

Devlin hauled the young man into the street and hustled him in the direction of Ancon, as he confidently declared:

"Your theories are too complicated, my son. Diplomacy has killed your speed. There is only one boss on the Isthmus, one man who can do things right on the jump without consulting anybody in the world. I'm going to put this up to the colonel."

"To Colonel Gunther?" Alfaro was dumfounded. "Will he let you talk to him? Will he bother himself with this affair of ours?"

"You bet he will. And let me tell you, a

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steam-shovel man with the high record for excavating in the Cut can go straight to the colonel on business a whole lot less important than this."

"Can we see him to-night?"

"No. There is no train to Culebra. But, lucky for us, to-morrow is Sunday, and he holds open court in his office, early in the morning. It is then that any man on the job with a kick, growl, or grievance can talk it over with the colonel. I will go to your hotel with you, Al-faro, and we will hop aboard the first train out. It will be only a few hours lost and that condemned old junk-heap of a *Juan Lopez* will not be many miles on her way to San Salvador."

Greatly comforted, the Colombian exclaimed with much feeling: "Next to the colonel, I think you are the biggest man on the Isthmus, Señor Devlin."

"I can handle a steam-shovel with any of them, and I aim to stand by my friends," was the self-satisfied reply.

Before eight o'clock next morning they were waiting in a large, plainly furnished room of a barn-like office building perched on the hill-

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side of Culebra. The walls were covered with maps and blue prints. At a desk heaped with papers sat the soldierly, white-haired ruler of forty thousand men, the supreme director of a four-hundred-million-dollar undertaking. His cheek was ruddy, his smile boyish, and he appeared to be at peace with all the world.

He had come to listen to complaints, no matter how trivial, to pass judgment, to give advice, like a modern Caliph of Bagdad. It was a cog in the machinery of his wonderful organization. Dissatisfaction had been checked as soon as the colonel set apart the one forenoon of the week in which his men were not at work in order that they might "talk it over with him." As Jack Devlin entered the office he was humming under his breath the refrain of a popular song composed by an Isthmian bard:

"Don't hesitate to state your case,
The boss will hear you through,
It's true he's sometimes busy
And has other things to do;
But come on Sunday morning
And line up with the rest,
You'll maybe feel some better
With that grievance off your chest."

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The colonel was listening gravely to a difference of opinion between a black Jamaican laborer and his buxom wife, touching the ownership of seventeen dollars which she had earned by washing and ironing. The wise judge ruled that the money belonged to her and ordered the husband to return it. He muttered:

"I'se a British subjeck, sah, an' mah property rights is protected by de British laws, sah."

"All right," and the colonel's blue eyes snapped. "If you like, I'll deport you. You can get all the English law you want in Jamaica."

A perplexed young man informed the colonel that he was the secretary of the Halcyon Social and Literary Club of Gorgona, which desired to give a dance in the ballroom of the Tivoli Hotel. The request had been denied because of a clash of dates with another organization. Would the colonel help straighten it out? Certainly he would, and he sent the young man away satisfied, after investigating the difficulty with as scrupulous attention as if the fate of the Gatun dam had been involved.

A brawny blacksmith's helper had been dis-

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charged by his foreman. He thought himself unfairly treated. The colonel pressed a button, and inside three minutes the man's record, neatly documented, was on the desk.

"You deserved what you got," crisply declared the colonel. "You were drunk and insolent, and I am surprised that the foreman did not tap you over the head with a crow-bar."

Jack Devlin restlessly awaited his turn, while Alfaro looked on with comical wonderment that so great a man should busy himself with matters so trifling. At length the colonel swung his chair around and affably observed:

"Hello, Devlin. Have you dug Twenty-six out of the slide? And when will she make another high record?"

"She is some bunged up, colonel, but still in the ring. The old girl will be going strong in another week."

"What can I do for you?"

"It's not myself that has any kick, colonel. I want your help for a friend of mine. He's not on the job, but I hope it will make no difference with you. He worked for Mr. Naughton on the dynamite ship, and then Major Glendin-

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ning half-way promised him a place on the gold roll because he can pitch ball like a streak of greased lightning."

Devlin halted and grinned at his own frankness. The colonel smiled back at him.

"Base-ball is irrelevant, Devlin, but I am sure Major Glendinning would make your young man earn his salary. So he wanted him to pitch for Cristobal? But you are the catcher of the Culebra nine. You show an unselfish interest, I'm sure."

"I'm a fierce rooter on the ball field, colonel, but I can't let it come between friends. This young chap, Walter Goodwin, got General Quesada down on him. He whaled the fat scoundrel with a broomstick on board the *Saragossa*. Quesada was trying to perforate Señor Alfaro here with a gun."

The colonel appeared keenly interested and interrupted to say: "Why, I was on the ship and I remember the youngster quite well. He was a seaman. The skipper told me about the row. I liked Goodwin's pluck. Between us, Devlin, the Panamanian gentleman had provoked a drubbing."

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"Yes, sir. Goodwin was working his passage to the Isthmus to look for a job and——"

"Why didn't he let me know it on ship-board?" queried the colonel. "I was interested in him."

"He didn't have the nerve. You looked too big to him. To cut it short, he was tipped over by the same landslide that left me and poor old Twenty-six all spraddled out. He came out of Ancon hospital yesterday with no job and his arm tied up. And he wandered down to Balboa and caught General Quesada's steamer, the *Juan Lopez*, stealing commissary stores from the wharf to outfit a filibustering expedition. Quesada got hold of him and lugged him off to sea last night. It's surely a bad fix for Goodwin."

The colonel no longer smiled. His resolute mouth tightened beneath the short, white mustache. The blue eyes flashed. He listened to Alfaro's detailed confirmation of the story. With winning courtesy the colonel said to him:

"Your father, the Colombian minister of foreign affairs, has no love for the United States, I am told. Will you tell him, with my

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compliments, that I greatly admire the behavior of his son?"

Turning to Devlin he added, crisply, decisively:

"I have no reason to doubt your story. You have a fine record. I shall act first and investigate later. Goodwin was kidnapped from the Zone, from American soil, as I understand it. He was living with one of the surgeons at Ancon?"

"Yes, colonel. You can find out by telephone easy enough."

"How many men were there on the *Juan Lopez*? And how fast is she?"

Alfaro answered:

"There were fifty or sixty men on board when I saw her at Balboa yesterday. Perhaps more were taken on in the bay last night. I know something about filibustering expeditions. She would carry not less than a hundred men. And of course there are plenty of guns in her. Her speed is slow. She will go eight or nine knots, I think."

"Will General Quesada fight?" The colonel asked the question with distinctly cheerful in-

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tonation, as if for the moment he was more soldier than engineer.

"He may fight for his neck," said Devlin, "and if he has a chance to get away. He knows that he is caught with the goods. But without Captain Brincker, he is a lame duck."

"And you are sure that young Goodwin is in serious danger?"

"Why not?" and Devlin pounded the desk with his hard fist. "Quesada has motives enough for losing him somewhere."

"I agree with you. And, besides, I should like to recover those commissary stores."

The colonel gazed at the opposite wall, composed and thoughtful. Devlin eyed him wistfully, afraid that he might consider the case as beyond his jurisdiction. Then with a quick glow of heat, the anger of a strong man righteously provoked, the colonel said sharply:

"It is a rotten, abominable performance, clear through. We are wasting time."

Summoning a clerk, he told him:

"Get Captain Brett, the superintendent at Balboa, on the telephone. Tell him that I wish the biggest, fastest tug of the fleet, the *Daunt-*

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less, if possible, to be coaled and ready for sea in two hours. Please ask him to call me up and report.”

The colonel hesitated as if a question of authority perplexed him, but when the clerk returned he was ready with another command.

“I want to talk with Major Frazier of the marine battalion at Camp Elliot personally. Please connect his house with my desk.”

Devlin nudged Alfaro. The face of the steam-shovel man lighted with the joy of battle. The colonel was a man with his two feet under him. They heard him say to the commander of the force of United States marines:

“It is an emergency detail, Major. I will forward the formal request and explanation to you in writing, but the documents can wait. An officer and a half company of men will be enough. Yes, equipped for active service. Thank you, very much. I will have a special train at your station in an hour from now, ready to take them to Balboa. It is a bit of sea duty. Your men will enjoy it.”

Other orders issued rapidly from the colonel’s

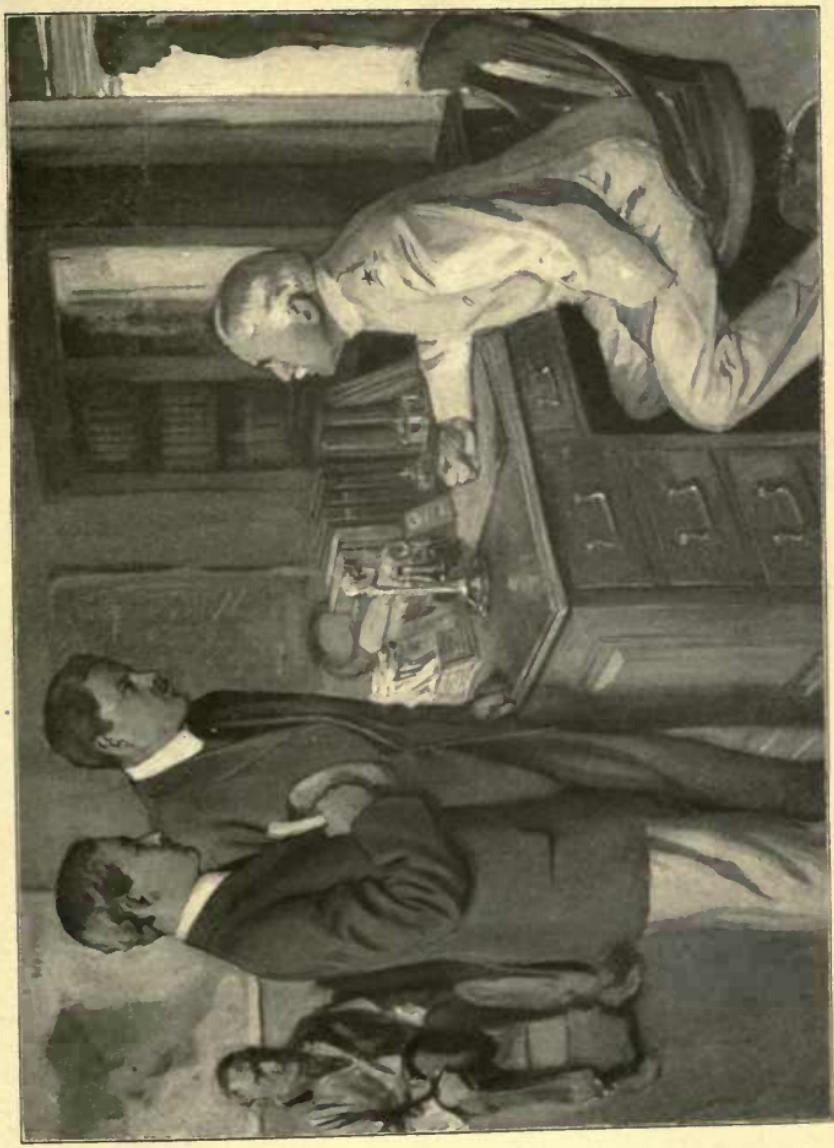
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desk. The Panama Railroad was notified to despatch a special train and give it a clear track through to the Pacific. The Department of Justice of the Canal Zone was requested to prepare the papers in due form for the arrest of General Quesada, and the seizure of his vessel. The splendidly organized system of administration moved as swiftly and smoothly in behalf of that humble, forlorn young wanderer, Walter Goodwin, as if he had been a person of the greatest consequence. As a final detail, the colonel made out passes permitting Devlin to go in the special train and on board of the government tug.

"You will want to see the fun, I suppose," said he, and his blue eyes twinkled again. "I should enjoy it myself."

"Indeed you would, sir," frankly replied Devlin.

"I think the capture of the *Juan Lopez* is in capable hands, with you and the marines as the fighting force. Report to me as soon as you come back. And bring Goodwin with you. I want to congratulate him on the kind of friends he has made on the Isthmus."



"Report to me as soon as you come back. And bring Goodwin with you"

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They stepped aside and made way for a committee from the machinists' union with a grievance concerning pay for over-time. The colonel settled back in his chair to give the problem his judicial attention. As Devlin left the office he said to Alfaro:

"What did I tell you, my son? When you want quick action there is no boss like a benevolent despot. That man will finish the Panama Canal two years ahead of time because the people at home have sense enough to let him alone."

"If he had ambitions like General Quesada he would rule all of South America," was the tribute of Fernandez Garcia Alfaro.

A little after ten o'clock of this same morning the sea-going tug *Dauntless*, of the dredging flotilla, swung away from the coaling wharf at Balboa. Beneath her awnings lounged thirty marines in khaki who welcomed Jack Devlin as a friendly foe. Several of them had played on the Camp Elliot nine of the Isthmian League, and the stalwart Culebra catcher had more than once routed them by hammering out a home-run or a three-bagger at a critical moment.

"It's comical that we should be chasing after

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a pitcher that will try to trim both of us, Jack," said a clean-built sergeant.

"Maybe he will ease up and let us hit the ball occasionally," replied Devlin. "He is a good-hearted lad and he will be grateful for a small favor like this."

The *Dauntless* was faster than the *Juan Lopez* by two or three knots an hour. General Quesada had about ten hours' start in his flight up the coast. The pursuers could not hope to overtake him until the morning of the second day at sea. The excitement of the chase kept all hands alert and in high spirits. From the captain of marines in command of the detachment to the stokers in the torrid fire-room ran the fervent hope that General Quesada, outlawed and desperate, would make a fight of it. The marines regretted that cutlasses had not been included in their equipment. The proper climax of such an adventure was an old-fashioned boarding-party.

The long, hot day and the sweet, star-lit night passed by and the powerful tug steadily tore through the uneasy swells of the Pacific, holding her course within sight of the Central

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American coast lest the quarry might double and slip into bay or river.

The whole ship's company crowded forward when the master of the *Dauntless* shouted from the wheel-house that he could make out a smudge of smoke to the northward.

Slowly the tell-tale smoke increased until it became a dense black streamer wind-blown along the blue horizon. Whatever the steamer might be, she was lavishly burning coal as if in urgent haste.

The captain of marines sternly addressed his hilarious men, threatening all sorts of punishment if they so much as cocked a rifle before the order was given. Shading their eyes with their hands, they stood and watched the funnel of the distant steamer lift above the rolling waste of ocean. Slowly her hull climbed into view, and the skipper of the tug recognized that rusty, dissolute vagabond of the high seas, the *Juan Lopez*.

Shortly after this, the fleeing filibuster must have recognized the *Dauntless* as hailing from the Canal Zone. The funnel of the *Juan Lopez* belched heavier clouds of smoke from her funnel and an extra revolution or two was coaxed

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from her decrepit engines. The *Dauntless* gained on her more slowly. Now the cheerful marines dived below to handle shovels instead of rifles, and they mightily reinforced the sweating stokers.

"I can juggle coal pretty fast myself," said Jack Devlin, as he stripped off his shirt and followed the other volunteers.

This frenzied exertion was needless. An hour or two and the *Dauntless* must certainly overtake the laboring *Juan Lopez*. Sympathy for Walter Goodwin, anxiety to know what had become of him, made them wild with impatience. He was an American, one of their own breed, and he was in trouble.

The vessels were perhaps three miles apart when the *Juan Lopez* veered from her course and swept at a long slant toward the green and hilly coast.

"There is no harbor hereabouts," shouted the skipper of the *Dauntless*. "They are going to beach her and take to the woods."

The alarm on deck reached the ears of Jack Devlin, who popped out of the stoke-hole and viewed the manœuvre with blank dismay.

"I don't blame Quesada for beating it to the

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tall timber," he muttered disgustedly. "But what about Goodwin?"

The *Dauntless* turned to follow, but her master was unfamiliar with the shoals and reefs lying close to the land. He reluctantly slackened speed to feel his way inshore. The *Juan Lopez*, handled by one who knew where he was going, made straight for a small bight of the coast where the jungle crept, tall and dense, to the beach.

The marines opened fire when the converging courses of the two vessels brought them within extreme rifle-range of each other. The *Juan Lopez* showed no intention of heaving to. Her crew could be seen running to and fro, working furiously at the tackle of the boats, making ready to drop them overside. The volleys from the *Dauntless* seemed only to quicken their industry.

"Oh, for a Maxim or a Colt's automatic!" sighed the captain of marines. "I'd make that wicked old tub look like a porous plaster. Who ever dreamed the beggars would do anything but surrender?"

General Quesada had obviously concluded

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that it was better to try to find another ship and more guns and rascals than to cool his heels in an American jail. The flight of the *Juan Lopez* ceased abruptly and at full-tilt. She grounded close to the beach, and the shock was so great that her ancient funnel was jerked over-side as if it had been plucked out by the roots.

Many of her crew tarried not for the boats, but jumped overboard, bobbed up like so many corks, and scrambled through the surf to scuttle headlong into the jungle.

The disappointed marines were within effective shooting distance, and they merrily peppered the vanishing rogues. The *Dauntless* swung her boats out and a landing-party was swiftly organized. The boats of the fugitive filibusters were more or less screened from view by the intervening hull of the *Juan Lopez*. A sharp lookout was kept for the bulky figure of General Quesada himself. Somehow he escaped observation. Before the marines had set out for the shore, the last runaway from the *Juan Lopez* had fled across the beach and buried himself in the jungle. The stranded ship had emptied herself as by magic. It was concluded

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that General Quesada had been among the crowd which filled the boats and floundered pell-mell through the surf.

"The boss pirate got away from us," disgustedly exclaimed Jack Devlin.

"There is no use chasing them through the jungle," said the captain of marines. "They will scatter like a bunch of fire-crackers, and we should be tangled up and lost in no time."

"I did not see Goodwin anywhere," replied Devlin, looking very anxious.

"The hull of the *Juan Lopez* was between us and the boats, so that we couldn't see all of them go ashore. Goodwin may have been taken into the jungle. If he had been left behind on the ship, he would be making signals to us by now."

"He would if he were alive," dolefully muttered the steam-shovel man.

CHAPTER VIII

WALTER SQUARES AN ACCOUNT

LOCKED in a room of General Quesada's house, Walter Goodwin felt acutely sorry that he had not minded his own business. He ought to have reported his suspicions to the American officials of the Canal Zone. In his rash eagerness to play a man's part he had undertaken a task too big for him. He was badly frightened, and yet he could not bring himself to realize that serious danger threatened him.

Waiting in the darkened room, he heard the boat's crew make a landing at the sea-wall near by. Instead of passing into the street, they turned and began to climb the stone staircase, in the rear of the house. Their talk had ceased. One of them laughed and another hushed him with a low command. There was something sinister in this approach. Walter surmised that their errand might concern him. Into his mind came the tales he had read of wild,

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cruel deeds done in this Bay of Panama in days gone by.

The men from the boat halted on the staircase, and presently Walter heard the rumbling undertones of General Quesada. A door was opened, and the swarthy sailors from the *Juan Lopez* filed into the room. They closed around Walter as if intending to take him with them. He wanted to motion them away, to show them that he was an American, that he could take his medicine like a man, but, alas! the brave, boyish impulse came to naught. He could only stare stupidly at one and the other, as if beseeching them to reveal their purpose. The mate in charge of the party, a sprightly, shock-headed fellow with gold rings in his ears, liked the lad because he made no foolish outcry, and tried to cheer him with a friendly grin.

They escorted him to the sea-wall and thrust him into the boat. If he shouted for help, only the Panamanian sentries posted along the ancient fortification would hear him. It was no business of theirs if a sailor was being carried off to his ship. In the stern loomed the broad, shapeless figure of General Quesada. The oars made bright flashes in the phosphorescent

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waters of the bay, and the boat moved out into the silent night.

Walter comprehended that he was being carried on board the *Juan Lopez*, because General Quesada was afraid to leave him behind as a witness of his misdeeds. It was a most alarming situation, but Walter was comforted by the hope that Captain Brincker would befriend him during the filibustering voyage. The soldier of fortune was the most masterful man of the rascally company and was likely to hold the upper hand.

At length the low hull of the laden steamer was discernible in the star-lit darkness. A gangway had been lowered, and after General Quesada had clumsily clambered to the deck, Walter followed with the help of the good-natured mate. He was promptly shoved into a small deck-house and left to wonder miserably what would happen next. There was much commotion in the steamer. From the loud talk, Walter gathered that she was ready to sail as soon as Captain Brincker should come on board. The forlorn lad anxiously listened for the strong voice of the soldier of fortune.

A sailor entered the deck-house on some hasty

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errand and left the door unfastened. Walter ventured outside and was unnoticed in the confusion. Leaning over the rail, he gazed at the lights of Ancon and thought of his stanch friends Jack Devlin and Alfaro. They would not know what had become of him. They were powerless to aid him.

A gasoline launch was coming toward the steamer from the direction of Panama. The filibustering crew was more noisily excited than ever. Captain Brincker was expected to come off from shore in a row-boat. This sputtering launch was instantly suspected. The *Juan Lopez* was a steamer with an uneasy conscience, quick to take alarm. Her hull began to vibrate to the clangorous beat of her engines as she prepared to take flight.

The launch swung in a wide arc to pass close alongside. General Quesada was hailed in Spanish and told to wait for an important interview. He was not inclined to parley. All he could think of was that the American authorities wished to overhaul and search the steamer, and he frantically ordered her to make for the open sea at top speed.

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The voice from the launch had sounded familiar to Walter Goodwin. Hope leaped in his heart. His friends were trying to rescue him. Before he could call out, Fernandez Garcia Alfaro was shouting to him in English:

"Ho, there, Goodwin! We are wide awake. Keep your courage. We will not give you up!"

Walter tried to yell a glad response, but a hand was clapped over his mouth, and he was roughly dragged back into the deck-house. For the moment disappointment overwhelmed him, but he found consolation in the fact that his friends had traced and followed him. Otherwise he would have felt quite hopeless, for the *Juan Lopez* had sailed without Captain Brincker and there was no one to stand between him and the ruffianly vengeance of General Quesada.

The general was too busy during the night to pay heed to his prisoner. He sorely needed the seasoned soldier of fortune to handle the lawless crew. The encounter with the launch had made him fear pursuit, and his martial spirit was considerably harassed. He blamed Walter Goodwin as the source of his woes, and yearned to knock the meddlesome young passenger on the

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head and toss him overboard. This was not feasible, however, because although the ship's company was ripe for revolution, rebellion, or piracy on the high seas, they would draw the line at cold-blooded murder. It seemed an easier solution of the problem to take Goodwin ashore with the expedition and conveniently lose him in the jungle of San Salvador.

"He looks at me like the cat that swallowed the canary," sighed Walter next morning. "Oh, if my right arm was only well and sound, I might fight my way out of this fix somehow. But I just can't believe that things won't come my way."

There were several English-speaking adventurers on board, recruited from the ranks of the "tropical tramps" of Colon and Panama, and General Quesada was unwilling to have Walter make their acquaintance. His story might enlist their sympathy. He was therefore removed from the deck-house and put in a small state-room below. A sentry was posted outside the door, and a boy from the galley brought the rough rations served out to the crew.

It was a tedious imprisonment, with nothing

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to do but lie in the bunk, or walk to and fro three steps each way, or gaze through the round port-hole at the shining, monotonous expanse of ocean. Now and then the deck above his head resounded to the measured tramp of many feet and the cadenced rattle of breech-blocks and bayonets. Rifles had been broken out of the cargo, and the landing party was being drilled.

The boldly romantic character of the voyage made Walter's blood tingle. To be afloat with these modern buccaneers who were bound out to raid the Spanish Main was like a dream come true. But he had no part in it. He was something to be got rid of. Youth is not easily dismayed, however, and the whole experience was too fantastic, too incredible, for Walter to regard his plight as gravely as the facts warranted.

On the second day at sea, he was staring through the open port, sadly thinking about the fond household in Wolverton. There was a sudden shouting on deck. The engines of the *Juan Lopez* clanked and groaned as if they were being driven beyond the limit of safety, and every beam and plate and rivet of the rusty hull

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protested loudly. Some one ran through the cabin shouting:

"They are after us, all right. This blighted old hooker can't get away."

Walter cheered and jubilantly pounded the door with his undamaged fist. A faster steamer was chasing the *Juan Lopez*. It must have been sent out from the Canal Zone. Poking his head through the port, he squirmed as far as his shoulders would let him. Far astern he caught a glimpse of a black, sea-going tug of large tonnage, whose tall prow was flinging aside the foam in snowy clouds.

Soon the *Juan Lopez* sharply altered her course and began to edge in toward the coast. From this new angle Walter was able to watch the tug draw nearer and nearer until he could make out the khaki uniforms of the marines massed forward.

"Here is where General Quesada gets what is coming to him," he cried exultantly.

He wiped his eyes and blubbered for joy. He was proud of his country. There was no taking liberties with Uncle Sam on the high seas! A little later he became alarmed at discovering

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that the *Juan Lopez* was heading straight for the beach. He comprehended the purpose of General Quesada. The steamer was to be rammed ashore and the crew would escape into the jungle. They might take Walter with them, beyond all reach of rescue.

Now the bullets from the tug began to rattle against the fleeing steamer or to buzz overhead. Walter dodged away from the port-hole and tried to kick the state-room door from its hinges. He could hear the crew working in wild haste to cast loose and lower the boats. From the hold came a tremendous roar of steam. The *Juan Lopez* was in danger of blowing up before she stranded.

Then there came a rending shock as she struck the beach. Walter was thrown from his feet and dazed, but he managed to scramble to the port-hole, where he could see the crew diving overboard and fleeing through the surf. Others were tumbling pell-mell into the boats. In any other circumstances the flight of these bold revolutionists would have been vastly amusing.

Walter began to hope that he had been forgotten in the panic. As soon as the ship was

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deserted he would smash the flimsy door and gain the deck, where he could signal the other vessel and let his friends know that he was alive and well.

Before he could break his way out, the door was hastily unlocked, and there stood General Quesada, perspiring freely and greatly excited. He had delayed to get his precious prisoner who knew too much. Carelessly assuming that in his disabled condition Walter could make no resistance, he proposed to take him from the ship single-handed. In expecting meek obedience he was guilty of a serious error of judgment. With rescue so near, the robust youth was in no mood to obey the beckoning gesture.

He objected to being led into the jungle, and his objection was sudden and violent. His wits were working as nimbly as if he were pitching a championship game of base-ball. This was his first chance to meet the enemy on anything like even terms. And he had a large-sized score to settle with General Quesada. Walter would have preferred a hickory broom-handle and plenty of room to swing it, but without

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weapons of any kind and only one good arm he must choose new tactics.

General Quesada stood in the doorway and growled impatiently at him. Stepping back to gain momentum, Walter lowered his head and lunged forward like a human battering-ram. He smote the corpulent general in the region of his belt. The impact was terrific. The amazed warrior doubled up and sat down with a thump and a grunt, clasping his fat hands to his stomach. His appearance was that of a man who had collided with a pile-driver.

Walter climbed over his mountainous bulk and the general was too breathless to utter his emotions. His face expressed the most painful bewilderment. He had ceased to take interest in his very urgent affairs. Walter had no time to pity him. He had resolved to assist the stern course of justice to the best of his ability.

Using his left arm and shoulder, he sturdily shoved at the collapsed general until he had moved him inside the state-room. It was like trying to shift a bale of cotton. The door opened outward into the main cabin, so that Walter was able to close and lock it. Then he

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pushed and dragged a table, a bench, and several chairs to build a barricade against the door as an extra precaution. This accomplished, the weary and panting youth said to himself:

"I think that will hold him for a while. It was about time the worm turned. Now I'm willing to call it quits. And his crew isn't going to bother to look for him."

This was a sound conclusion. It was a case of every man for himself. They were entirely too busy trying to outrun the bullets of the marines to concern themselves about the fate of General Quesada. He could not even yell to them to wait for him, because the collision with Walter's hard head made it necessary for him to remain seated on the floor, still pensively clasping his belt and wondering what had happened to him.

Walter was for taking no chances with his prize. Perching himself upon the barricade, he waited for the boarding-party from the tug to find him. The ship became silent except for the shriek of the steam from the safety-valves. Walter was left in sole command to enjoy the situation. Presently General Quesada showed

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symptoms of reviving. He lifted his voice in a quavering appeal to his comrades in arms, but they had disappeared beyond the green curtain of the jungle. Walter listened to the plaintive wail and gloated. He was not vindictive by nature, but there was such a thing as righteous retribution. When General Quesada became more vigorous and began to kick the door, Walter addressed him soothingly and advised him to be calm.

When the party of marines reached the steamer, Jack Devlin was one of the first to scramble on deck. The voice of this faithful friend came down the companion-way to Walter.

"He is not in the ship, you can take my word for it. He would have surely shown himself by now."

"Oh, don't look so sad-eyed and hopeless until we make a search," replied the captain of marines. "I can't believe that he was put out of the way during the voyage. And we didn't see him taken ashore."

Walter kept silent. This was the most delightful moment of his life. Presently Devlin came downstairs into the cabin. The place

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was gloomy after the dazzling sunshine above, and he halted to get his bearings. Then moving forward, he almost stumbled into the barricade of furniture. Walter leaned over, grasped him by the shoulder, and exclaimed:

“I’m glad to see you aboard. Did you have a pleasant trip?”

The steam-shovel man jumped back, and emitted a yell which could have been no louder if he had been clutched by a ghost.

“Are you honestly alive?” he gasped. “You blessed young rascal, you! You scared me out of a year’s growth.”

“Of course I am alive, and doing very nicely, thank you. How in the world did you happen to get on my trail? And what about the tug and the rest of the outfit?”

Walter tried to make his voice sound as if this were a commonplace meeting, but his eyes twinkled with mischief as he thought of the second surprise in store for the steam-shovel man.

“I’ll tell you all about it when you are safe aboard the *Dauntless* yonder,” said Devlin. “And what are you doing roosting on that heap

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of furniture like a crazy hen? Oh my, but I'm sorry General Quesada got away from you. We surely did pine to lug him back to Panama with us."

The hapless general in the state-room had become silent, for he was reluctant to draw the attention of the American party. Walter chuckled as he replied:

"I have a present for you. It is a big one. If you really want General Quesada, you can have him with my compliments."

"You're joking, boy. He is boring a large hole in the jungle by this time."

"He wishes he was. Open this door behind me and see what you find."

Devlin tossed the furniture aside and entered the state-room. General Quesada was sitting on the edge of the bunk and appeared very low-spirited. Just then the captain of the marines came below with a dozen privates at his heels. The steam-shovel man loudly summoned them, adding with tremendous gusto:

"Didn't I tell you that Goodwin was the finest lad that ever happened? All he needed was a chance to get into action."

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They cheered for Goodwin, and cordially invited General Quesada to surrender and end the war.

"You *would* steal Uncle Sam's groceries and go skylarking off to start trouble in the cute little republic of San Salvador, would you?" playfully remarked a sergeant of marines. "I never had a chance to talk plain to a real live general. Step lively, now. No impudence."

The general was permitted to get his personal baggage, after which the marines escorted him to the *Dauntless*, where his fallen fortunes met with little sympathy. He was a sullen, despondent figure and not a trace of his pompous bearing was left.

The sea was so smooth and the weather indications so favorable that it was decided to salvage the cargo of the *Juan Lopez*. Her arms and munitions and supplies were valuable and would be confiscated by the American government after due process of the law. The transfer had to be made in small boats, and was a task requiring two or three days. The *Juan Lopez* was hopelessly stranded. She would soon go to pieces, a melancholy memorial of a Spanish-

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American revolution that was nipped in the bud.

Walter Goodwin was in danger of being spoiled by the marines who petted and pampered him, and were never tired of hearing him spin the yarn of his adventures which began with the episode of the parrot and the broom-stick. Their surgeon attended to the injured arm, and found that it was little the worse for the rough usage of the voyage. His verdict was so encouraging that Walter could hope to play base-ball before the Isthmian League finished its winter season.

This aroused violent argument on board the *Dauntless*. A war of words raged over Walter's services as a pitcher. Jack Devlin set up a claim in behalf of Culebra, because he had engineered the rescue.

"All obligations to Naughton and those other Cristobal robbers are wiped out," cried he. "If I hadn't set out to find you and stuck to it like a terrier at a rat-hole, where would you be now?"

"Camp Elliot has a pretty fast nine," chimed in the captain of marines, "and Goodwin fairly

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belongs to us. Didn't we have a lot to do with getting him back?"

"I really belong to Cristobal—" Walter tried to explain, but Devlin cut the discussion short by declaring:

"We'll put it up to Colonel Gunther for a decision."

After one of these good-natured altercations, Walter called the steam-shovel man aside and anxiously told him:

"It is all very fine to be called a hero and to be in such demand as a pitcher, but it doesn't make me very happy. I came to the Isthmus to look for a job on the gold roll and I seem to be getting farther away from it all the time. I am broke and my folks at home don't know where I am, and I don't seem to be giving them a lift very fast."

Devlin was instantly attentive and serious. It seemed to strike him for the first time that being rescued was not a part of Walter's real programme.

"Of course, I thought you ought to be pretty well satisfied with yourself," said he. "You have kicked up a most amazing rumpus for

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a lad of your tender years. Now, about a job——”

“Don’t think me ungrateful,” broke in Walter. “I don’t deserve all this wonderful friendship and kindness. I am just worried about things, that’s all, and I want your advice.”

“You are perfectly right, my boy. You are keeping your eye on the ball. In the first place, the colonel himself is interested in you. He ought to be. You made trouble enough for him. And Major Glendinning will forgive you for trying to stop that landslide in the cut. You have recovered a good many dollars’ worth of commissary supplies for him, and that thief of a checker has been gotten rid of. You can take it from me that he hasn’t been seen since. Your stock ought to be way above par by now.”

“Do you really think there will be something for me to do?” asked Walter.

“If there isn’t, I’ll recommend you to the colonel for the job of suppressing Spanish-American revolutions with neatness and despatch. The Panama republic and San Salvador between them ought to reward you handsomely for putting the lid on General Quesada.”

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"Maybe my luck has turned," was Walter's hopeful comment.

"If it hasn't, my son, you can set me down as a mighty poor guesser."

CHAPTER IX

A PARENT'S ANXIOUS PILGRIMAGE

FOR the present Walter Goodwin may safely be left on board the sea-going tug *Dauntless* in charge of the faithful Jack Devlin and the admiring marines. Some attention should be paid to the parents and the sister whom he had left behind in Wolverton. Their affairs may seem very prosaic after the crowded experiences of the only son by land and sea, but nevertheless they deserve to be accounted for.

As the waiting days wore on, the house seemed to echo with loneliness. Walter had filled it with lusty clatter and activity, and the very disorder he had always left in his wake was an intimate part of the family life. There was a jubilee when his first letter arrived from the Isthmus, telling them of a safe voyage and of finding employment on the very day he landed. Because the thoughtful youth made no mention

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of the dynamite ship, the household became more cheerful and less anxious. Walter was the most wonderful boy in the world.

Several days after this they received two letters in the same mail, which caused alarm and bewilderment. One of them had been dictated to Naughton in the Ancon hospital, the other written and signed by the impulsive Jack Devlin. They told the news of Walter's accident and this was very disturbing in itself, but, alas, the well-meaning attempt of the steam-shovel man to send solid aid and comfort by means of a money-order inspired the most alarming conjectures.

Mr. Horatio Goodwin was a man of a practical turn of mind, and he sounded the first note of misgiving when he told his wife and daughter:

“I cannot understand it at all. Walter has been hurt, but he sends us no details whatever. In this letter, which he dictated from the hospital, he tells us a great deal of interesting news about the Panama Canal, but it sounds as if it had been written by a man thoroughly familiar with the work.”

“Walter is very bright—” began Eleanor.

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"He never shone at English composition," sighed her mother.

"And I am quite sure he is not a trained engineer," added Mr. Goodwin. "The letter is not like Walter at all, and as for this money-order for forty dollars enclosed in the brief note from Jack Devlin——"

Mrs. Goodwin no more than half heard this speech. She was wondering whether Walter was really having good care. How dreadfully forlorn it must be in a hospital two thousand miles from home! Supposing one of those horrid mosquitoes that carry yellow-fever should fly in and bite him?

"Bless his heart!" cried she. "And we have no idea of what has happened to him. And to think of his sending money to us when I am quite sure he must need it for himself! It is just like him."

"He was probably hurt while trying to save somebody's life," quoth dewy-eyed Eleanor. "This Mr. Devlin says that poor Walter was a bit mussed up. It sounds perfectly awful, doesn't it?"

Mr. Goodwin shook his head and appeared

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more than ever perplexed as he reread the two letters and laid them side by side on the sitting-room table, with the mysterious money-order between them.

"You two hero-worshippers do not seem to realize what an extraordinary affair this is," said he. "In his own letter Walter makes no mention of sending money. And in the same mail comes this large remittance on account of Walter's salary, and it is enclosed by one Devlin, who seems to have no official position on the Isthmus."

"He is the steam-shovel man who filled Walter with the notion of going to the Isthmus," said Mrs. Goodwin. "Walter thought he was a splendid fellow."

"But Walter knew nothing about him. And it is out of the question that a boy like him should be given forty dollars in advance by a government department only a few days after his arrival on the Isthmus."

"Walter must have made a wonderfully fine impression," argued the doting mother. "He was worrying about us, and he asked Mr. Devlin to look after his affairs and mail some money to us."

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This sounded plausible, provided one took an exceedingly rosy view of Walter's earning capacity, and as Mrs. Goodwin and Eleanor regarded it, nothing was too extraordinary to happen on the Isthmus of Panama. But after Eleanor had gone to bed Mr. Goodwin eyed the baffling money-order and lost himself in meditative silence. At length his wife reminded him:

"You have been staring at that table long enough, Horatio. And you are worrying more and more. Of course, all I can think of is that Walter is ill and needs his mother. I hope his next letter will explain everything."

"He is the only boy we have, and I wish he was at home," said Mr. Goodwin in a low voice. His shoulders sagged more than usual and his face was white and tired. The absent son was tugging at his heart-strings. Unconsciously he let his glance dwell on the shabby old easy-chair in which Walter had been wont to fling himself after supper and study his high-school text-books.

"Why, Horatio, you look as if you thought something serious might have happened to him," exclaimed his wife. "I confess that I

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am very low in my mind, but mothers are silly creatures. Are you very anxious?"

"You and I have never hidden anything from each other, my dear," he slowly answered. "Neither of these letters is from Walter himself. They make me feel as if we had not really heard from him. If some one had a motive for wishing us to believe that we need have no anxiety about Walter, this money might have been sent for a purpose, to keep us quiet."

"A bad motive? These letters were meant to deceive us?" quavered Mrs. Goodwin, and then she rallied to say with the most emphatic decision, "I don't care if it costs a dollar a word, Horatio, I want you to send a cable message to the hospital as soon as the office opens to-morrow morning. I would gladly sell every stick of furniture in the house to be sure of getting a reply from Walter within the next twenty-four hours, and so would you."

"That is precisely what I had decided to do," he exclaimed with an approving smile. "I indorse your ultimatum, my dear. We shall hear from Walter to-morrow, and then we'll be

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laughing at each other for borrowing so much trouble."

It therefore happened that before noon of the following day there was delivered to the surgeon of the accident ward a message, which read thus:

Goodwin hospital Ancon.

Cable me is all well.

Father.

The surgeon sighed as if here was a hard nut to crack. This was only the day after Walter Goodwin had vanished from the hospital, to the consternation of his friends, Devlin and Alfaro. They had hurried into Panama in search of him and no word had come back to the surgeon.

"I have no idea where Goodwin is," he said to a friend of the hospital staff. "He failed to turn up here last night, and I guess his friends couldn't find him. They were afraid he was in trouble."

"What will you do with the cablegram?"

"I think I had better hold it for two or three days before I try to answer it myself. Devlin

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or that impetuous young diplomat from Colombia may drift in and tell me some news. And Goodwin himself may reappear. I hate to cable the agitated parent that his son's whereabouts are unknown. It would be like looking for a needle in a hay-stack for me to try to find him in Panama."

The surgeon tucked the message in his pocket and went to join his white-clad fellows in the operating-room. He was a very busy young man, and there was no time in his crowded day to investigate the disappearance of Walter Goodwin. And inasmuch as the *Dauntless* and the marines had been sent to sea with very little publicity, several days passed before the story of the pursuit of the *Juan Lopez* reached the hospital.

Meanwhile that anxious parent, Mr. Horatio Goodwin, had found it difficult to give proper attention to his book-keeping duties in the office of the coal-dealer in Wolverton. He started nervously when any one entered the place and his eye was alert for the cap and buttons of a telegraph-messenger boy. At the end of the first day of waiting, he trudged homeward in a

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state of mind distraught and downcast. His wife was grievously disappointed that no word had come from Walter, but Eleanor maintained her blithe spirits. She had suddenly decided to become a sculptor and labored until bedtime over a sticky lump of modelling clay.

"This is a bust of Walter," she announced. "It looks as if his face had been stepped on, but the firmly moulded chin is quite well done, don't you think? It is comforting to look at that sculptured chin. It shows that Walter can overcome all obstacles. It helps to keep me from worrying about him."

Even this masterpiece failed to console the parents, who waited in vain through another long day. Every little while Mr. Goodwin darted from the coal-dealer's place to the telegraph office. At supper he told his wife:

"There has been no interruption in the cable service, and our message must have reached Ancon within two or three hours after I sent it."

"Walter may have left the hospital by this time," said she, "but they ought to know his address."

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"Yes. The department in which he is employed should be able to locate him at once. The whereabouts of every American must be on record."

Walter's silence tortured them. Like other fathers and mothers since the beginning, they imagined all sorts of mischances which might have befallen him, just as when he had lingered after dark at the skating-pond his mother was sure he had broken through the ice. Such crosses as these the right kind of parents must bear. It is part of the price they pay. On the Isthmus of Panama Walter Goodwin might consider himself a man, but in his own home, in the hearts of his own people, he was still a boy to be watched over, to be feared for, to inspire a thousand tender anxieties of which he would never be aware.

"It will be very hard to wait for a letter from him," murmured Mrs. Goodwin. "I have tried to be brave, but——"

"You have been brave and fine," and her husband kissed her. "Perhaps I should not have let him go. I find it difficult to apply myself to my day's work. I can write to the canal

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authorities asking them to make a search, but we could not expect a reply before three weeks."

At breakfast next morning Eleanor, whose faith in the ability of her masterful brother to conquer in any circumstances was still unshaken, declared with the air of one who had solved a problem:

"If I were the parent of an only son who was lost, strayed, or stolen, do you know what I'd do? I should take that money-order that has made all the trouble and use it to pay my way to the Isthmus of Panama as soon as I could."

"It would take a good deal more than forty dollars," replied Mrs. Goodwin, "and your father could not leave his business."

"Very well, but father can find another position, and he can never find another son like Walter." Eleanor's eyes sparkled with determination. "We may be poor just now, but you have said a hundred times that you are rich in your two children. It seems to me that you have lost half your fortune. At least, you don't know where he is."

Mr. Horatio Goodwin made no argument. His gaze was rather absent as he sat looking at

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his impulsive daughter. She had echoed what was in his own mind, but he could not make it seem practicable. Mrs. Goodwin revealed what was closest to her own heart by exclaiming unsteadily:

"I was awake most of the night trying to plan this very thing, Horatio. Oh, I want you to go to Panama and bring Walter straight home with you. Why, Eleanor and I would take in washing if necessary. Is it impossible?"

"Nothing is impossible if you try hard enough," gravely affirmed Eleanor. "There is Joan of Arc, for instance. She is my favorite character in history. Just think what she went through—"

"The comparison is a little far-fetched," said Mr. Goodwin, as he looked at the clock and went into the hall to put on his overcoat. He was usually at his desk on the stroke of the clock, but now he lingered. All his days he had walked in the beaten path of habit, a methodical man unaccustomed to veering off at sudden tangents. Now he had been violently lifted from the rut and his mind was in rebellion. He had been afraid of poverty, but this anxiety

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was overshadowed. Mrs. Goodwin followed him into the hall. Her troubled face was so eloquent that he said:

"It is not really impossible, my dear. I could raise the money for the trip, either on my note, or by placing a small mortgage on the house."

"You need not worry about leaving us," she replied. "There is a little left in the savings-bank, and we can get along nicely."

"Oh, you blessed daddy," cried Eleanor, her arms around his neck. "When can you start? I will help mother find your summer clothes in the attic, and pack the little black trunk. You are going to the tropics, you know."

"There is no hurry, my young fly-away. Matters are not in shape to go at a moment's notice."

He was not as deliberate as his words indicated. On the way to the coal office he bought a New York newspaper and turned to the shipping advertisements. A steamer was scheduled to sail direct to Colon that very afternoon at five o'clock, and there would be no more departures for several days. Mr. Goodwin

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wore a hopeless air. It seemed utterly out of the question for him to take this steamer, although a train connection from Wolverton would enable him to reach the wharf by four o'clock. Unreconciled to the delay, he entered the coal office and listlessly took the ledgers and journals from the safe.

His employer, an elderly Irishman with a rough tongue and a reputation more or less ungodly, halted while passing the desk and inquired:

"What's been on your mind for the last couple o' days, Mr. Goodwin? You've been hoppin' in and out of here like a distracted flea. Anything wrong with th' strappin' lad that went sailin' off to make his forthune? Has he been forgettin' to write to ye? 'Tis the way of 'em. I raised five meself."

This solicitude was unexpected, and Mr. Goodwin stammered in surprised tones:

"Why, thank you. Yes, I am greatly concerned about Walter."

"Tell me about it," demanded the other. "Has he got himself into a scrape, or can't ye get anny word from him at all?"

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The father explained matters, and the shrewd, leathery countenance of his employer expressed lively interest as he commented:

"Thim Spaniards is a queer lot. I mistrust 'em on gineral principles. One of me own boys fought agin 'em in the war, tho' he was fightin' typhoid-fever germs at Tampa durin' the whole of his enlistment. Annyhow, ye ought to go down there right away an' look after your boy. 'Tis the proper thing to do. Ye have no lads to spare."

"I hope to be able to arrange to go, but—but I expected to consult with you—" began Mr. Goodwin.

"You need not worry about your job, if that's what you're drivin' at," exclaimed the old man. "'Tis not much of a job, but it will be here when you come back. As ye know, keepin' my books is no great undertakin' an' I pay what it's worth. It would go agin me principles to pay more. Have you enough ready money to finance th' journey? I hope ye will have two fares to pay comin' back."

"Well, I haven't the funds just at present, but I may be able, in a few days, to secure——"

A PARENT'S ANXIOUS PILGRIMAGE

"Quit beatin' about the bush, Mr. Goodwin, and talk to me like a man. Are you afraid I'll bite ye? There ain't a citizen of Wolverton that stands better than you. Why will ye go messin' around and wastin' time tryin' to raise money? Will three hundred be enough? Ye'll find a way to pay me when you get on Easy Street again, and I will not burst into tears if you don't."

Mr. Goodwin fumbled for his handkerchief. He had all the symptoms of a cold in the head. His employer regarded him with an enjoyable grin and resumed:

"You don't know what to make of me separatin' meself from a dollar unless it's took from me by violence. My dear man, I'm a philanthropist in disguise, tho' I didn't know it meself until now. When does a ship sail to the place ye want to go to?"

"This afternoon. I can catch it if I go to New York at eleven o'clock," answered the dazed book-keeper.

He was grasped by the back of the neck, his hat jammed on his head, his overcoat flung at him, and as the strong arm of the coal mer-

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chant propelled him to the front door a husky voice roared in his ear:

"Trot home an' say good-by to the wife an' stop at the bank as ye dash for the train. The cash will be there. Now shoo, an' God bless ye! I have five of me own, and I would go to a hotter place than the Isthmus of Panama for anny one of them."

Mr. Horatio Goodwin ran home so fast that he lost his breath and could only paw the air and make funny noises while his dismayed wife hovered over him and was undecided whether to bathe his head in cold water or summon the family doctor. He had begun to make a feeble remark or two when that serene damsel Eleanor laboriously descended the stairs, the little black trunk bumping behind her. She showed both insight and presence of mind by exclaiming:

"He is not having a fit, mother, dear. He is in a great hurry to go to Panama, and he isn't used to running up the hill. I had an impunct that he would come home this morning, and I've been getting things ready for him."

"Is the child dreaming?" cried Mrs. Good-

A PARENT'S ANXIOUS PILGRIMAGE

win. "Horatio, what *is* the matter with you?"

"Eleven o'clock train—steamer this afternoon—everything arranged—straight from heaven—last man in the world to expect it from—can't understand it—" panted Mr. Goodwin, who had dropped into a chair and sat with his legs sticking out straight in front of him.

His audience waited to hear no more, but began to whisk things into the little black trunk.

"It is just like being in a drama," observed Eleanor, her cheeks as red as two roses. "I may try to write a play, for I begin to have doubts about my genius as a sculptor. Where are father's clean socks, mother? In the mending basket?"

"Do find his last summer's straw hat," commanded Mrs. Goodwin. "I am afraid Walter used it as a target and shot the crown out. Horatio, do you suppose a batch of my doughnuts would keep if I put them in a tin cake-box? Walter simply dotes on them."

"Put them in my straw hat? Nonsense!" returned Mr. Goodwin, to whom this dialogue

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had sounded rather confused. "Please telephone for a cab, Eleanor. I wish to have plenty of time at the station, and we can sit down there and talk things over. I was never caught in a whirlwind before and my wits seem to be considerably scattered."

Granted peace of mind, the sea voyage to the Isthmus would have been a rare vacation for Mr. Horatio Goodwin. As it was, he felt ready to risk his neck in a flying-machine to reach the journey's end as soon as possible. He found the passengers most cordial and sympathetic and every one on board took an interest in his quest.

As soon as the steamer dropped anchor in Colon harbor the captain began to make inquiries. One of the doctors from the American quarantine station, who came on board to inspect the ship's company, happened to be a friend of Naughton, the dynamite man. He had met that bland gentleman a few days before and obtained from him an unfinished story which was not calculated to reassure Mr. Goodwin.

"Indeed I have heard of young Goodwin,"

A PARENT'S ANXIOUS PILGRIMAGE

said the doctor. "You see, I am a base-ball crank, and I knew that he was expected to pitch for Cristobal. His first job was unloading dynamite for Naughton——"

"Unloading dynamite!" murmured the father of Walter. "Was he—was he blown up?"

"Not a bit of it. He made good. The next I heard of him he was dug out of a landslide in Culebra Cut."

"And did he survive that?" Mr. Goodwin's knees were trembling, and he sat down in a deck-chair.

"Oh, yes. It didn't damage him much, barring a badly wrenched arm which spoiled his pitching. He was in Ancon hospital——"

"Then the letters were all right. I am so relieved," and Mr. Goodwin's face beamed. "Now I can find him and——"

The quarantine doctor looked perplexed and hesitated before he replied:

"I hope so. The last time I saw Naughton he told me a most remarkable yarn. Young Goodwin had been carried to sea in a filibustering steamer by a notorious Panamanian named Quesada, who had it in for him. A govern-

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ment tug and a company of marines were sent in chase."

"And what then?" Mr. Goodwin had completely wilted.

"I haven't heard the end of it. The tug ought to be back by this time unless she had to run all the way to San Salvador. I'm quite sure the boy is all right. He is hard to down. I shall be glad to put you in touch with the right people as soon as you get ashore."

"This all sounds like the worst kind of a nightmare," wearily muttered Mr. Goodwin. "If I can find him I shall take him home by the first steamer."

CHAPTER X

BASE-BALL AND A HAPPY FAMILY

ALMOST a week after the *Juan Lopez* had fled so hastily from the Bay of Panama, Walter Goodwin came back in the government tug with a body-guard of devoted marines. Although he had managed to make a good deal of noise in the world for a youth of his years, he had no false ideas of his own importance. As he looked at it, he had made a muddle of things and his friends had pulled him out. He must show them that he could stand on his own feet and they must be given no more trouble in his behalf. Before landing at Balboa, he said to Jack Devlin:

“Please forget about me. I can jump right in and look for a job.”

“Not until I have taken you to the colonel. Those were his orders. We’ll board the first train to Culebra on the chance of finding him in his office.”

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"Did he really want to see me?"

"Sure. You are the prize disturbance of the Isthmus."

Colonel Gunther was in consultation with two of his division engineers when the steam-shovel man led Walter in by the arm. Shoving aside a mass of blue-prints and typewritten data, the colonel stepped forward and heartily exclaimed:

"Why, here is the young man who was so handy with the broomstick! I am delighted to know that your latest voyage has turned out so well. I understand that you bagged General Quesada as an incident of the adventure."

Walter blushed and replied:

"I had a lucky chance to get square with him, sir."

"The lad used his head, colonel," put in Devlin, with a broad grin. "It's head-work that counts on the Isthmus, if you please. I have heard you say it yourself."

"I can't thank you enough. I wasn't worth all that trouble," said Walter.

"Oh, perhaps you were," smiled the colonel. "That remains to be seen. Devlin told me

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that you were looking for work when you got into this extraordinary scrape. You have done the Canal Commission a considerable service. Would you like to take a position on the wharf at Balboa?"

Walter was about to answer with great fervor when a tall, spare gentleman in khaki entered the office from another room and paused to survey the group. Then he raised his voice abruptly and protested:

"Pardon me, colonel, but Goodwin belongs to me. I saw him first. With your permission I will use him in the Cristobal commissary."

"Oh, how are you, Major Glendinning," and the colonel chuckled. "Has base-ball anything to do with your lively interest in this young man?"

"Officially? No. Between us, as man to man? Yes," frankly returned the major. "The force at Cristobal will be most unhappy if Goodwin is sent to Balboa. They will consider themselves wronged. Their morale will be impaired."

"Is it as bad as that?" The colonel tried to look serious. "If base-ball is really involved,

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I had better surrender. I would rather not add to my troubles."

The major bowed his thanks, and his stern features relaxed in a mischievous smile. Turning to Walter, he said in his curt way:

"Glad to see you again. How is the arm? I called at the hospital to see you, but you had flown off on that ridiculous voyage. Can you steer clear of landslides and revolutions for a while?"

"I'll try, sir. I should like to lead a very quiet life. I can pitch again before long."

The major glanced at the colonel and said impressively to Walter: "I shall give you a job in my department, not on account of your base-ball, mind you, but because you did a clever, plucky piece of work on Balboa wharf. Is that clearly understood?"

"Be careful, or you will protest too much," laughed Colonel Gunther, as he returned to his desk. "I think there is no question that Goodwin has earned the right to a job in the Zone."

Jack Devlin shook hands with Walter and whispered:

"I had it in mind to put in a word my-

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self. I want to break you in at firing a steam-shovel when you are strong and husky again. But it would have started another row over the base-ball end of it. Major Glendinning is a stubborn man to lock horns with. So long, my boy. Your luck has turned. I'll look you up on my first day off."

"You are the best friend a fellow ever had," said Walter.

Two days later he was put on the gold roll as a commissary clerk and assigned to the great warehouse in Cristobal, which was filled with groceries, dry-goods, hardware, shoes, crockery, candy, and what-not. It was one depot of the unique system of store-keeping conducted on a vast scale by a paternal government. After his breathless adventures, Walter was glad to work with all his might at the humdrum task of tallying the merchandise as it came in from the railroad cars.

He was thus engaged when his father found him. Mr. Horatio Goodwin halted amid the boxes and barrels, and stood staring at his tall son as if to make sure that his vision had not tricked him. Walter dropped his tally-sheet, blinked in his turn and shouted:

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"Goodness gracious, father! Is it you or somebody else?"

With this he made a violent assault on his parent, swung him clear of the floor in a bear-like hug, and set him down in a rumpled condition.

"Are you really all right, Walter?" gasped Mr. Goodwin.

"Of course I'm all right. Can't you see it for yourself? You can't lose me," Walter kept repeating as if he were firing minute-guns. "And what brought you way down here from Wolverton?"

Mr. Goodwin tried to explain, but both were too excited to weave a coherent narrative, and after waving his hands helplessly the father cried:

"We can tell all this later. I have come to take you home with me. A steamer sails for New York to-morrow."

"To take me home with you?" Walter's face was dismal beyond words. This was a worse catastrophe than the landslide. "Why, father, you don't understand. Everything is coming my way. I am on the gold roll at seventy-five per month, and I intend to send

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'most half of it home. I had a few little upsets, but that's all past. Do you honestly mean it?"

"It is why I made the long journey," firmly answered Mr. Goodwin. "Your mother and I cannot stand it, Walter. After she hears of the dynamite and the landslide and the pirates she will never forgive me if I leave you here."

"But you will give me a chance to talk it over with you?" implored Walter. "A fellow can't afford to have his career smashed all to flinders. Please look around first and see what a fine country this is to live in. It is as quiet and safe as Wolverton, and a good deal healthier."

"Your adventures sound like it," was Mr. Goodwin's dry comment. "Can you quit work at once and come over to the hotel with me?"

"Not until noon and then I will knock off for dinner, father. It wouldn't be square to leave my job, even to talk things over with you. Excuse me, but I must keep this car-load of stuff moving."

Mr. Horatio Goodwin was repulsed, but by

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no means vanquished. For all his mild demeanor, he had an obstinate streak, and his purpose of taking Walter home was unshaken. As a dutiful son, Walter was sorely distressed. He had never defied his father, nor did he wish to do so now. But he could not bear to think of leaving the Isthmus with success in his grasp. Resorting to strategy, he said to his father when next they met:

“Now that you are here, why don’t you spend a week in seeing the canal? It is the greatest show on earth. You ought not to miss it. You needn’t worry about me. I am as safe as if I were clerking in a corner grocery in Wolverton.”

The suggestion delighted Mr. Goodwin, although he had a struggle with his conscience on the score of expense. He ought to hasten back to his desk in the coal-dealer’s office. But never again would he have such a vacation as this, and it would be easier to persuade Walter by pressing the argument gradually. Next morning Mr. Goodwin, eager and alert, went out to view the Gatun locks and dam.

Walter toiled in the commissary and medi-

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tated great thoughts. There must be some way to solve the problem. He bided his time until Major Glendinning, passing through the warehouse on a tour of inspection, halted to ask:

“How are you going to like the job?”

“Tremendously, sir, thank you. But I may have to resign this week. My father has come after me.”

“What? Does he think you are incapable of taking care of yourself?” thundered the major.
“What’s the matter with him?”

“They want me with them at home. I am too far away from the family.”

“Pshaw! Does your father need you in his own business?”

“No, sir. His business doesn’t amount to much at present. He was with the Wolverton Mills for twenty years as accountant and book-keeper——”

“The mills closed down,” interrupted the major. “I used to purchase from them.”

“Yes, sir. My father is a first-class man in every way, but times are dull at home and—and—” Walter mopped his face and floundered on, “you see, I happened to think that instead

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of my going home to the family, I might somehow manage to bring the family down here. It sounds foolish, but——”

Major Glendinning was both touched and amused. He had heard of Walter's ambition to “give his father a lift.”

“You mean to insinuate that there might possibly be an opening for a first-class accountant and book-keeper in the canal organization?” he queried. “Can you recommend him?”

“Very highly,” was Walter's grave reply. “I have known him for seventeen years, and he can furnish the very best of references.”

“Bless me, but you are a sort of continuous performance,” exclaimed Major Glendinning. “A really first-class accountant and book-keeper! Um-m! If you are a chip of the old block, your father deserves careful consideration. Such men are not any too easy to find for the office work of the various departments, even though the pay-rolls are full.”

“He is at the Washington Hotel in Colon,” hopefully suggested Walter. “Of course, I am very anxious to stay on the job, and I don't want to disobey him——”

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"Perhaps you can persuade him to file a formal application," said Major Glendinning.

Six weeks later a holiday crowd assembled in the base-ball park at Cristobal to see an important game of the Isthmian League series. These hundreds of cheerful, hearty Americans stood for something more than a keen interest in the most popular sport of their nation. They showed that the pestilential tropics had been conquered, that the northern races could live and work and play in health and comfort where once the fever-laden Chagres River had slain its thousands.

When the bow-legged captain of the Cristobal nine, "Bucky" Harrison, led his men across the diamond for preliminary practice, the grandstand greeted the pitcher with particular applause. He was tall and rugged and of a pleasant countenance, and one might have heard the on-lookers remarking:

"That is young Goodwin. Cristobal expects to win the championship with him."

"He is in the commissary and doing very well, I understand."

"His father has a position in the same de-

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partment, and the family lives at Cristobal. The mother and sister are sitting over yonder. Do you see the pretty young girl with the fair hair and the pink cheeks? She is in the Zone high-school."

As Walter Goodwin swung his good right arm in "warming-up" practice with the catcher, he glanced at the grandstand with an air of pride and satisfaction wholly unselfish. His venturesome voyage to the Isthmus had been tremendously worth while. One more achievement, and his cup would be full to overflowing. He must prove that he could pitch winning base-ball. But a fellow who had earned a place for himself on the gold roll, and then found a fine position for his father, and moved the whole family from Wolverton, ought to face the heaviest hitters of the Culebra nine with a good deal of confidence in himself.

Shortly before the game began, Walter spied a black-haired young man, who came running across the field, wildly waving his Panama hat. With a joyous shout, Walter scampered to meet Señor Fernandez Garcia Alfaro, who explained in his dramatic fashion:

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"I have just now arrived from Colombia in the nick of time to behold you play the grand sport of base-ball, my dear friend. My steamer lands me at Balboa this morning. I jump for the train. I rush. I am in the break-neck hurry, and here I am."

"This is a glad reunion. And General Quesada and his parrot will bother you no more for some time," cried Walter.

"So I have heard. He is locked up in Uncle Sam's hotel with the iron bars, which is a very good place for him. I am going back to Washington to be a diplomat some more. And how is that dear family of yours? What do you hear from them?"

"They are all here," exclaimed Walter, as he dragged the surprised Colombian toward the grandstand. You may be sure that Mrs. Goodwin and her daughter found this young man entertaining company, for he promptly delivered himself of a eulogy of Walter as a noble, splendid young man who had saved his life. In his own country girls of fourteen were young ladies and to be treated as such, wherefore he instantly lost his heart to Eleanor and

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was so flatteringly attentive that she felt very grown-up indeed.

Their animated conversation ceased when the Cristobal players took their positions in the field, and the first of the Culebra batsmen marched to the plate. Mr. Horatio Goodwin actually shut his eyes when Walter was ready to deliver the ball. There was one other spectator quite as fidgety as he. It was that devoted patron of Isthmian base-ball, Major Glendinning.

The opponents from Culebra were brawny men, and they were not at all interested in the emotions of the Goodwin family. They proposed to hammer the young Cristobal pitcher out of the box, and during the first and second innings it looked as if they might be successful. That temperamental dynamite expert, Naughton, slumped in a disconsolate heap when he beheld Walter's pitching pounded for one hard, clean hit after another. The game was still young, however, and the Cristobal fielding was sharp and steady.

Walter gritted his teeth and took his punishment manfully. Jack Devlin was catching

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for Culebra, and as Walter came to the bat, the steam-shovel man muttered behind his mask:

“See here, my boy. I’ll turn traitor for once. I want to see you make good. I am responsible for you. Don’t try to win on your speed. Ease up. Save yourself. Use your head. You go at things too hard.”

Here was friendship indeed. Devlin was as loyal to the Culebra nine as he was to the devouring monster of a steam-shovel, old Twenty-six, but he felt that as “Walter’s god-father by brevet” he was in honor bound to stick to him through thick and thin. The advice was sound. Already Walter had felt warning twinges in his arm. He became more deliberate and wary, and Culebra’s batting streak was checked. The Cristobal partisans cheered him lustily, and that elderly gentleman of large affairs, Major Glendinning, was guilty of pounding a perfect stranger on the back. Then “Bucky” Harrison and his comrades rallied and dismayed the Culebra pitcher by driving in three runs, which tied the score.

The game seesawed for some time, while

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Walter Goodwin became more effective and cool-headed. The fateful seventh inning arrived, and the score still stood at 6-6. Then Cristobal gained a run on a timely hit. A little later, Culebra filled the bases with two men out. Walter hitched up his belt and stole a glance at the grandstand. Eleanor was leaning forward, lips parted, hands clasped, "wishing hard enough to win," as he had so often beheld her on the high-school field at Wolverton. He turned to face the Culebra batter, a bronzed six-footer of the steam-shovel brigade. Just then there came booming across the field the voice of Naughton:

"Oh, you Goodwin! Remember how you handled the stuff on the dynamite ship. This is easy."

This was the right word in due season. Walter realized that he had stood the test of a bigger game than this, that he had proved himself in the day's work. As methodically as if he were carrying cases of dynamite across the deck, he turned and sent the ball breaking across the corner of the plate. The Culebra giant swung at it as if he expected to drive a

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home-run into the Caribbean Sea. "One strike," called the umpire. The next ball floated lazily and so deceived the batter that he made no attempt to hit it. A third ball was batted high in air to fall into the waiting paws of "Bucky" Harrison.

Walter had pitched himself out of the tightest corner of the game against the most formidable team of the Isthmian League. The game was won, for during the last two innings neither side was able to score.

Walter's friends gathered around him as he pressed through the crowd to join his family in the grandstand. Naughton marched at one elbow, Jack Devlin at the other. Mr. Horatio Goodwin was earnestly shaking hands with his wife, nor did he foresee that henceforth he was to be known on the Isthmus, not by his own very respectable name and station, but as "the father of the kid pitcher." Eleanor was confiding to Fernandez Garcia Alfaro:

"He is the most wonderful brother that ever was. I wish I could show you the bust that I made of modelling-clay. The firmly moulded chin was prophetic. I can't understand how

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they managed to dig so much of the Panama Canal without him."

Alfaro was as delighted over all the good fortune which had come to the Goodwin family as if it had happened to himself.

"I shall go to Washington and be a diplomat with a heart full of the greatest gladness," he shouted to Walter. "*Viva everybody!*"

Jack Devlin approached rather sheepishly and eyed Mr. Goodwin uneasily as he confessed:

"About that money-order I sneaked to you with the best of intentions. It made you so much worry and false alarm about the boy that I ought to be kicked. Here is where I apologize."

"It was the most brilliant inspiration you ever had," cheerfully replied the father of Walter.

"Your generous impulse was one of the causes that brought us to the Isthmus to live," added Mrs. Goodwin. "You had something to do with reuniting the family. We feel under great obligations to you."

"Everything has ended so happily!" came from the radiant Eleanor. "Life is uninterest-

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ing unless there are a few complications to look back on as one grows older."

In the evening Jack Devlin called at the cottage under the palms at Cristobal, beside the white beach and the flashing sea. He wished to pay his formal respects to the Goodwin family, believing himself largely responsible for their migration.

"There have been times when that lad of yours wished he had never set eyes on me," he said to Mr. Goodwin, "but I reckon I'm forgiven. He had a good berth in the commissary, but I am hoping he will want to tackle a grown man's job after a while. If you want to finish his schooling I will say no more, but there is no all-round education in the world like holding down a job on the Panama Canal."

"Walter informs me that he wishes to become a mechanical engineer," replied Mr. Goodwin. "My parental authority has been rather shaky ever since my son recommended me to Major Glendinning. It will be some time before I dare to assert my rights as the head of the family."

"Father is joking," exclaimed Walter. "My

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family responsibilities did give me some worry, but they are off my hands."

"Then with your father's permission, you will begin your real education with a fireman's shovel, feeding coal into old Twenty-six," said Devlin. "It is not an easy school, but I think you can stand up to it by next summer."

"It sounds like a great place for a husky young fellow," blithely quoted Walter, and Devlin indulged in a reminiscent grin.

"I think I told you something like that once upon a time," said he.

"You spoke words of wisdom," was Walter's emphatic verdict. "I am sure that father and mother will agree that your advice was gilt-edged. I am not looking for easy work. I want to help dig the Panama Canal. It will be something to feel proud of all my life. And before the Culebra Cut is finished and the big ships go sailing through, I intend to be a full-fledged steam-shovel man."

THE END

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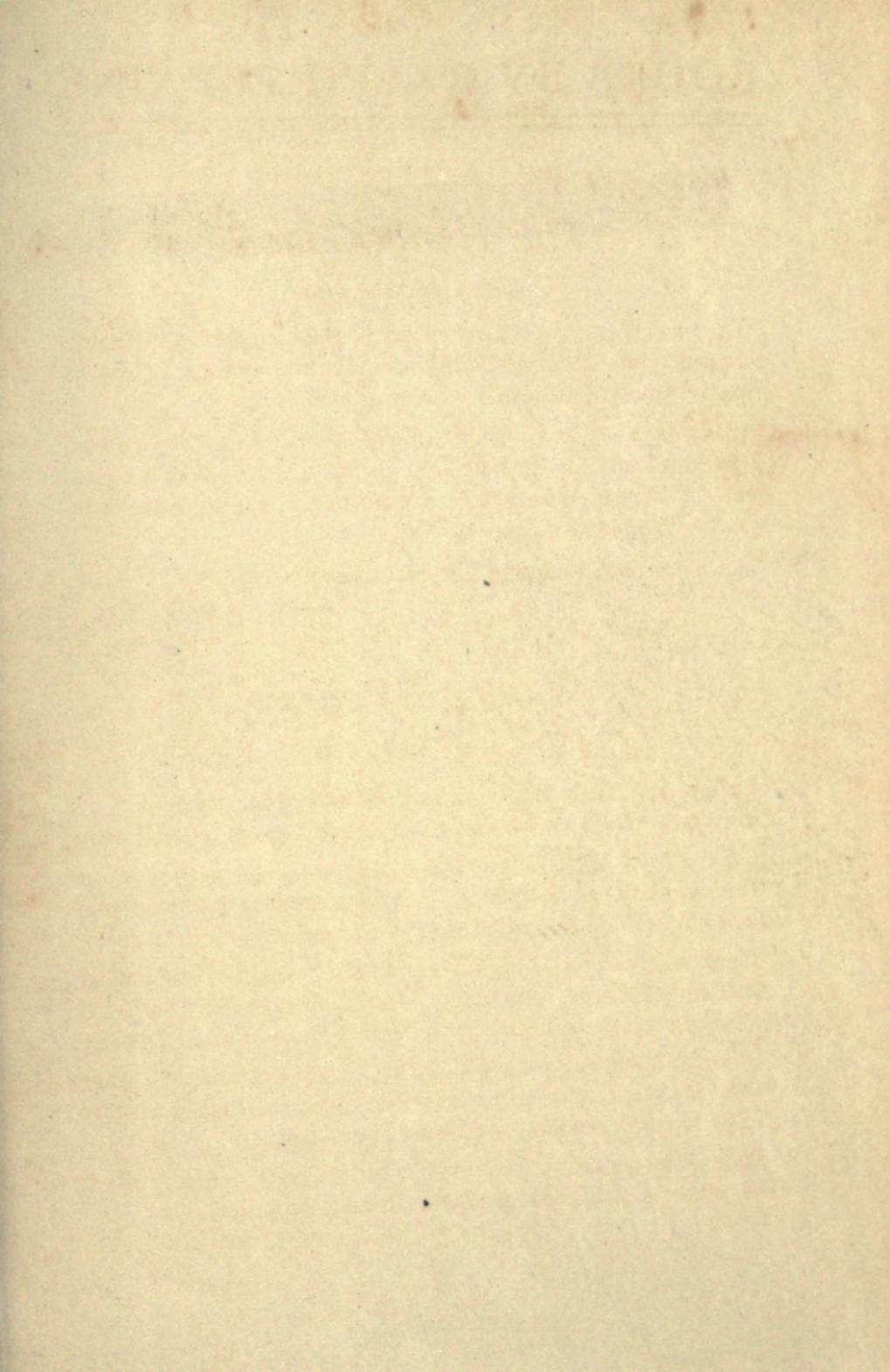
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